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POEMS

LOST FOOTSTEPS

POEMS

BY

WALTER SWEETMAN, B.A.

'Is it not written in your law: I said you are gods?'

St JOHN, Chap. x.

EDINBURGH PUBLISHING COMPANY.

1875.

P R E F A C E.

I HAVE to add a few words to the following pages, which complete, in some sort, a work to which I have been long devoted. In a series of tales and poems, I have endeavoured to put forward a system of Christian philosophy, which I hope and believe to be at once comprehensive and simple. Simple it most certainly is; and simplicity is much. The great masses of mankind may never perhaps be much the better for the extraordinary literary researches of our day, but they can all understand plain truths plainly expressed; and it is for them that I write.

In these wonderful times when, more than ever before, the true principles of Christian morality are beginning to pervade the world—truth and justice and brotherly love, and, above all, that sense of the natural equality of man, which recognises no differ-

ence between the personal happiness of a king and a peasant—while more than ever before a spirit of the gloomiest scepticism is spreading around,—it would almost seem as if we were losing our faith in the Gospel at the very time when we are at last enjoying its fruits; and that we are really beginning to have some practical idea of loving our neighbours as ourselves, at the moment that the dreariest of all philosophies would seem but to push physical theories to their legitimate conclusion, if it held that the business of man upon earth is to elbow his fellows out of his way, and to die last if he can.

To meet that philosophy with its own weapons, and to fight inch by inch for the rational ground of the poor man's certainty that he has but to be good to be happy, has been the first object of my labours—labours which, as I have explained elsewhere,* I believe to have been successful, and to have deserved a very different reward from that which I have hitherto received.

But as I look back once more over my arguments, I remember some which I would like to amend and

* In a pamphlet on Free Will, published for me by Messrs Hodges & Foster of Dublin, in 1873.

strengthen. To begin with, I did not know until lately that the Roman Catholic Church has admitted, in one most important instance, the chronology of the Septuagint into her Liturgy. The consequences of such a fact for a Catholic are immense. At the first glance, it plainly makes us a present, so to speak, of another thousand years for the possible existence of man upon earth. But it does far more. It shows us clearly her whole view of the Bible—a view which makes Sacred Scripture supernaturally inspired as to its *end*, but not necessarily as to its words; and now that I know that it is hers, I see that no other view is rationally tenable. It is quite plain that the last lines of St John's Gospel do not describe an absolute or possible fact; and here, again, dispassionate thinkers should recognise the enormous advantage of her position over that of Protestantism for combating infidelity. For the Evangelical Churches, the Bible is all in all; for the Roman Catholic, it is only one of her supernatural helps to truth.

She holds that its true province is to afford her inspired data for her decisions on the Deposit of the faith; and perhaps it is to show that such is its

province that some apparent discrepancies in its testimony have been suffered to exist.

The next matter that I would say a few words of links itself with this. I pointed out in my story of 'Onward,' that a strong argument in favour of the Christian theory, is to be drawn from the fact that we find man, at the opening of authentic history, with an intellect fully equal to our own, but in all matters of experience most lamentably weak. A good argument, as far as it goes; but I would like to have pointed out even more fully how the Scripture narrative in the main seems to agree with the deductions of natural science. If we are really an improvement upon apes, the earth ought to contain, in stone or other imperishable matter, most copious traces of the long progression of our race from primary mops and mows to the verses of Homer and the temples of Memphis. But nothing of the kind exists. On the contrary, we find those strange flints which people tell us are hatchets, and we find the Pyramids, but absolutely no middle terms; for I believe it is a fact that no single implement of polished stone can be shown to date behind comparatively a most recent period. I may remark, that

the early use of bronze, instead of iron, points in the same direction. We use iron, because we have found out its merits; but I should think the working of the composite metal requires, on the whole, more ingenuity. Again, compare Grecian sculpture and Grecian navigation. The artist is born, while the sailor is made; and so Phideas flourishes, while Athenian ships of war can only sail before the wind. The very discoveries of the Phœnicians, taken along with their defective appliances of motion, but afford another instance of man's early intellect, and his early want of experience. But the great argument of all is language. If language be a human institution that gradually ameliorated chimpanzees, what almost infinite ages must have elapsed between the distinct articulation of the first "ba" and the psalms of David! And where are their records in the earth? Nothing in the world is there but those chipped cones that look so like pebbles, and a few bones and shells in which holes have been pierced. Can we fancy a man hammering down a tree with one of these, while he was meditating a new form of the genitive! The thing is absurd. Rational man was created with a language. There is no other solution.

On the other hand, I would be slow to speak of such a term in really human history as eight hundred years with the contempt that seems to befit very early times. Eight hundred years ago the Norman landed in England. Let us realize, if we can, a small part of what has happened since. About half way up, or I mistake, we shall find wonderful historians telling us all about astonishing kings who at least served the good purpose of giving plots to Shakespere. Are they in any way suggestive of those astounding first, second, and third dynasties of Egypt? But the hieroglyphics are truths; there is no mistake about that. Neither is there any mistake, as far as I can make out, in the fact, that with the very earliest of them there is combined a certain amount of phonetic writing. This is curious, to say the least of it. The antiquarian of the future may perhaps find traces of savage figure-writing scattered through the American continent, but he will scarcely find them first in the same inscriptions with the teaching of nineteenth century grammar-schools. It is strange that the man who has mastered the great fact that R A G E spells 'Rage,' should write the word with the figure of a gesticulating ape,

considering the enormous number of similar signs that he should be possessed of to keep up an extended correspondence. How is this to be explained? Can any explanation of it be given that will be entirely satisfactory? Perhaps not; but in much fear and trembling I will venture to hint at one which occurs to myself, and which I do not happen to have seen elsewhere.

Let us suppose—we may suppose anything—that all mankind are of one language, which some among them write phonetically, just as we write, or try to write, English. Let us suppose, secondly, that there is a God—it is a very large supposition, but I do not make it until I have devoted some years to proving that it is a reasonable one; and thirdly, let us suppose—imagination being the human power that approaches nearest to infinity—that this God, perhaps to punish human vanity, suddenly thinks fit to deprive His human creatures of their memory of past distinct sounds, leaving all their other rational faculties unimpaired; what will be the result? Why, clever people will take pencil and paper, and sticks and stones, and begin to make signs to convey their meanings. They will be doing this before the first

night is over, but it will be long, very long, before any single group have anything like a regular vocal language again. Yet they will remember much about a language, just as a man will retain a general idea of Greek grammar long after he has ceased to understand Homer. In the meantime, the clever persons who circulate ideas with their sticks and pencils will obtain immense influence which they are likely to retain along with the signs that gave it to them, in the first instance, long after the absolute necessity for these last shall have departed. This, I would venture to suggest, may have been the origin of the Egyptian priesthood, and the suppositions are simply taken from the Scripture narrative that was upheld by Christ who rose from the dead. Of course scientific people will laugh, but ought they to laugh? That is quite another matter.

At the same time, I only throw out this idea as a suggestion which may not be inconsistent with the recognised laws of language. A real and strong argument against the transcendental antiquity of Egypt, if I may call it so, is the fact, that the narrative of Genesis is left us by a man, or, as all will grant, by a nation, whose history is most inti-

mately bound up with that of the Egyptians ; and nothing could have been easier than for the writer to have thrown back the creation of the world by a few thousand years, if he thought the evidence demanded it. But to my mind it is quite impossible to doubt of the existence of Moses, and of his immense influence upon the thought and writings of his race ; and if Thucydides, let us say, or Pericles, had spent some of the best years of his life in an Etruscan city, and had left it as his opinion that the civilisation of the country did not date behind some three centuries, would anybody place much confidence in the truthfulness of writings which he must have seen, but which tell a different story ?

This brings me to my third point. How is it that Moses taught so obscurely, if he taught at all, the immortality of the soul ? May it not have been because one of the great objects of that first dispensation was to hold up an example to all time of the utter dreariness of our fallen human nature and its human lot before our redemption ?

The passage through the desert, and the golden calf, and those long lines of Hebrew kings, were to the mind of the Sovereign Artist but the dark back-

ground that was to throw out the brightness of His faith for the innumerable ages to come. If Moses could have told the people of heaven, the gloomiest tint of all would have been lost; and perhaps too the sceptics of our time, and of times as far from us relatively as the farthest of the fixed stars, would hold that he derived all his inspiration from Egypt. On the other hand, looking at his followers as individuals, can we avoid seeing that, living as they did in a very atmosphere of miracles, each one of them had at least as much help towards keeping the commandments as we have now?

Before leaving this subject, I would venture to suggest that perhaps the old historians were not so far wrong after all, when they made the original inhabitants of Egypt to be one branch of the family of Cham, the son of Noah. We would now seem to be told, at least by implication, that the predecessors of Menes, the first king, were gods and demigods; but I hope I have shown that it is but fair to grant that the evidence should be quite overpowering that could make it humanly probable, in the face of the narrative of Genesis, that any real Egyptian dynasty flourished very much more than

five thousand years ago. Just in the same way, in the face of the converging traditions of so many different peoples, the geological proofs should be strong indeed that could make it likely that there has been no Deluge. I know myself, that farmers find out to their cost that the earth has a strong tendency to return to its original form ; and that the new fence, which this year looks so high or broad or deep, will be small enough in another twenty; and it strikes me that if the whole ocean rose at once, the action of the waters, as they gained steadily on the land, meeting perhaps half way the outflow of the miraculous rainfall, might not have been, comparatively speaking, so very violent, and, to judge from all experience, would be sure to be exceedingly uncertain. At the same time, I would be far from maintaining that it is necessary for us to hold that all the world, as distinguished from all the world inhabited by real men, was then submerged. Lastly, I may observe, that I am not aware that there is any sufficient evidence of pottery having been used by those strange beings of post-pliocene times, who were clearly unable to learn during their long thousands of years how to point their stones; but if it was used

by them (and they certainly do seem to have had some appliances for the fastening of skins), I have given what would appear to me to be the most reasonable view of such a curious combination of facts in the following pages, and in the tenth chapter of the story of 'Onward.' To sum up in a few words: As God is Order, it seems to me that we should expect, from the inspired sketch left us of our creation, to find that the body of the first man should appear to have been slowly formed in accordance with material laws, but that his soul should evidently be a sudden emanation from on high; and such, I would venture to assert, is precisely the story which the earth and human records reveal to us. In the latter case, what we might call the laws of Natural Order have yielded to a Higher Order—an Order which must ever be in accordance with the Infinite Compassion, which requires that the balance of probability should be largely in favour of the Word of God. As I have just read for the first time in a very old book, "we are told that *'the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden.'*" These words plainly indicate that Adam was not created within the precincts of Paradise; and it is afterwards said, upon his being

turned out of the garden, that he was sent '*to till the ground from whence he was taken.*'"*

These are the few remarks that I think it well to add to the body of arguments that I have collected, upon what is to my mind the most important of all subjects. I believe that the very greatest good that can be done by man to man is to strengthen faith. Let liberty, health, nay, our minds themselves go, but, while we can think at all, help us to keep our Christian trust, and you will be our true friend. The young saints in Roman quarries, to whom Moore sent his Epicurean hero, whom he should not have made an Arian, would probably have told us that they were as happy there, as it is our ordinary human lot to be upon earth. It is to help the masses of men to keep that faith that I have written first of all. They will not read long theological essays, but they will read tales and poems; and do we not all know that difficult chapters of diluted truth may often be made to give us their whole essence in a few pleasant words? Besides, simple stories bring out, perhaps, best of all the thousand little lights of Christian thought, which

* *Encyclopædia Britannica*, A.D. 1810.

together make up the great argument of Christian morality.

I write this with the sad fact before me, that some of the most cruel crimes that have ever disgraced humanity have been committed in the names of different forms of our common religion,—a fearful proof of how necessary sound ideas are even among the best intentions. I wonder did it never strike Spanish inquisitors that, by making lives depend upon sacramental communion, they were just filling the earth with sacrilege. Surely the very first law of God is that each reasonable man should obey his own conscience; and it is a corollary from the second, that we should ever think of other consciences as favourably as we can. God calls all reasonable men to be good, but apparently it is only a certain proportion of them that He at present calls to be Christians, and fewer still to be Roman Catholics. Woe be to us if we reject such a call! Although it is quite possible that this very diversity of our religious vocations has been in the past the providential means of saving us all from stagnating into utter ruin; for we can scarcely read history with out seeing that one of the strongest incentives

to good has often been a wholesome emulation. Perhaps in the great future an entire liberality will be equally effective, as it would certainly seem to us to be more in consonance with the designs of Divine goodness.

It follows, too, from that commandment of loving our neighbours as ourselves, that in political matters we should ever seek the greater happiness of the greater number. Upon the broad principles of legislation, which I believe to tend to that happiness, I have dilated in my earlier writings, holding that an acquaintance with such things is a part of the plain knowledge of life, of which every citizen should be a master. Unfortunately for myself, however, I hold, too, that in honest politics it is necessary to think not only of what we should like to get, but of how we may be able to get it; and while I am quite clear that what we want in Ireland are popular education; a juster administration of poor law; and, though last, certainly not least, a fair chance for the industrious people to acquire permanent possession of the soil, I am quite as clear that we can only get these things by leaving the phantom of Home Rule, and uniting heart and head with the great

Liberal party of the empire. If my countrymen are prejudiced against me for these opinions, let them at least do me the justice to remember, that all I have predicted hitherto in the matter has come to pass.

Again, as to Rome, I would like to see the Pope sovereign of Rome, just as the authorities of my Church would like it; but I would like to see him sovereign of Rome with the consent of the Italian people. Without that consent I believe he never can be restored; and the sending of a few members to half-a-dozen foreign parliaments, pledged to make motions in the matter, exactly spoils the chance. What would England think of an agitation got up in Berlin for the armed restoration of Mr Gladstone? It is on the Italian chambers—perhaps on *reformed* Italian chambers—that the impression should be made; for I believe it to be for the real advantage of Italy that the Italian head of the Church should reign in Rome with a free constitution, and without a foreign soldier. Under such circumstances, an independent Rome would weaken united Italy just about as much as the freedom of the city of Hamburg would weaken Germany; and surely the

prestige of being, in one sense, the head of the Roman Catholic world is worth some little sacrifice upon the part of a Roman Catholic nation. Under such circumstances, too, the position of the Pope would no longer give encouragement to the representatives of fallen dynasties to ruin the Latin peoples, by introducing a different principle of loyalty from that of obedience to the national will. When minorities, instead of fighting their fellow-citizens with word and pen, and at the ballot-box, take to corrupting soldiers, buying rifles, and camping out on the hills, it is not difficult to foresee the end. Last of all, such an arrangement would make a present of a hundred thousand men to the nation; for where is the foreign enemy that would attack Italy, if the sword of her king was blessed by her sovereign pontiff?

I will conclude these few remarks by being bold enough to assert that the best way to meet Mr Gladstone's late pamphlet is simply to state the true Roman Catholic doctrine upon the matters referred to in it; the one thing, perhaps, which has not been quite done as yet. It is rather startling to find gentlemen in the highest, and in many ways most worthily

in the highest, literary position amongst us, putting forward, in these days, that teaching of the deposing power of the Popes, against which many of us have, under all proper sanction, taken the most solemn oaths, and against which the Catholic Universities consulted before Emancipation decided, as I believe, without a single exception. No doubt the importance of the subject is great, for a whole system of morals may be said to be tried by its crucial test; but whatever doubts upon the matter may have been reasonable until lately, it seems to me that there should be none now. The Council of the Vatican has most plainly declared that the inspiration of the Holy Ghost does not extend to the teaching of new doctrine, but only to the guarding inviolate of that delivered to the Apostles. Now it can scarcely be maintained that it was revealed to the Apostles that Elizabeth, let us say, would be too bad a queen for Catholics to serve, and therefore if a Pope were to issue any pronouncement upon such a subject, he would do so at the risk of his own conscience, and would be obeyed as to the matter of fact in question at the risk of other consciences. If it is sought to be maintained that the words of the

Council, 'For the Holy Spirit was not promised to the successors of Peter, that by His revelation they might disclose new doctrine, but that by His assistance they might holily keep and faithfully expound the Revelation or Deposit of faith delivered to the Apostles,' really means that the Pope can decide infallibly, and therefore in a way to bind the interior assent of Catholics upon all matters of fact, such as the virtue of Queen Elizabeth, which they may hold to be connected with faith or morals, I would answer that so wide an interpretation of any purely human enactment would be scouted out of every court of justice in the land. I would also point out that the very position of the words in the sentence tells against such an interpretation; for the word 'keep,' which alone, by any possibility, could be strained into including the infallible depositing power contended for comes first, thereby clearly showing that it is to be used in its natural and simple sense. They are first to keep the faith inviolate themselves; and secondly, to expound or teach it to others; and there their infallible power leaves them. There is not even a doubtful word of their being infallible in defending it.

Having expounded and taught that faith, it may sometimes, no doubt, be their duty to excommunicate those who will not obey the Holy Spirit speaking by their lips; but it is a human duty to be fulfilled, as I said, at the risk of their own consciences. The words are at once plain in themselves; and plainly, from the fact I have mentioned, in accordance with what was fifty years ago the teaching of the Catholic Universities of Europe; plainly too in accordance with our own oaths. Furthermore, as I have endeavoured to point out in the preface to my third volume, and my writings generally, they are strictly in accordance with what I may, perhaps, be allowed to call the most reasonable view of our faith. The Pope is infallible when he decides 'ex cathedra' upon matters of faith and general principles of Christian (or supernatural) morals; and he does decide 'ex cathedra' when he defines any doctrine regarding these with scientific accuracy and judicial solemnity. If the General of the Jesuits would only agree to this, and he cannot argue against it, I feel that Catholicism would rule the world.

These are my views, and I cannot help thinking that it is my duty to circulate them by every step

that is consistent with the upholding of my own freedom and my own character. All I ask from my fellow-countrymen is justice. Perhaps it is the very fact that nobody can answer my arguments that prevents my getting it. I know it is quite foolish to use too strong words in these matters, for I know that to each of us absolute justice will be done in the end; but I *will* say that it appears to me that I have often been treated with an ingenious malignity rather diabolical than human. If any one will say that this is just madness, I answer, that the silence alone, which has met such results as I can show, is enough to drive any man mad, much less a man of a keen imagination. But, thank God, I am not mad. Whether I am or not, I leave to the judgment of posterity. With all my strength I have written to help the religion to which I belong, and the people from whom I have sprung. Time will tell whether these last will be the better for treating me, as, with a few honourable exceptions, I have been treated.

It only remains for me to say, that this volume continues the story of my first dramatic poem, which should be altered in a few lines to meet it. If, in some instances, it seems to vary from the Scripture narrative, I would plead, first, poetical license; and

secondly, that they can be reconciled. Many of its pages were written in a cell, where the light of Heaven was scarce, and the stone floor often reeked until night. A poor return for my efforts to fill every home with sound thoughts and the brightness of Christian art! But a far worse return was the persistent denial of my rights as a man and a man of business, which caused me to be there. When I said the world was improving, I certainly was not thinking of its treatment of myself.

In the pamphlet on Free Will, to which I have already alluded, there is a short sketch in prose of my whole line of argument, every position in which I am prepared to defend; always remembering that some difficulties must ever be of the very essence of our Christian faith. Everybody will understand that the personal matter at the end of that pamphlet has been forced on me. To me it is simply detestable. I ought, however, to state, that the passages of the original document, which are omitted in the printed copies, are at the private service of any one who chooses to challenge them; and that by every statement, and opinion, and intention, expressed or implied in that document, I have ever been prepared,

with such strength as might be mine, to stand; while I assert—and this for the benefit of my persecutors as well as of myself—that it is a primal teaching of the Catholic morality upon which my deepest hopes rest, that it is better that the whole world should be blamelessly destroyed, than that a human soul should be stained by a single deliberate lie.

WALTER SWEETMAN.

December 28, 1874.



POSTSCRIPT TO PAGE xxiii OF PREFACE.

I find that the Pope has expressly declared that he is *not* infallible in his deposing power, which would seem to take the whole sting out of the claim. A father has the right to command his children (and the Pope is the spiritual father of us Catholics, being the dispenser of our spiritual bread,* and unquestionably supreme earthly judge of all doubtful matters of conscience as well as of ecclesiastical discipline); but if he commands what they feel to be wrong, they must not obey. Mr Gladstone has quite omitted to tell us how, if some one is not infallible in matters of Faith, that Faith is to be preserved to the end of time. I would suggest that Divine Providence may well seem to have allowed eighteen hundred years to pass before the exact seat of the infallible teaching-power of the Church was defined, in order that under its slower and more unwieldy, but, humanly-speaking, less dangerous form, the great formulas of the Catholic Faith should be laid down—formulas by which the Popes must for ever be bound. Mr Gladstone will find, as I have just seen pointed out, that the decrees of the Council of Constance to which he alludes, were designedly excepted from the confirmation of the Pope, which only extended to those which were passed ‘conciliariter,’ or after the usual manner of councils, which they were not. I would suggest, too, that with the wording of the Athanasian Creed before him, he should not have been so very severe upon that of Papal pronouncements. Yet we Catholics know what it means. At the same time I firmly believe that these pamphlets have done immense good by opening all eyes to the precipice to which a certain party in our Church was endeavouring to drag us, as well as by calling forth some of the answers that have been given, and notably that by Dr Newman.

* “Feed my sheep,” St John, ch. xxi. v. 17.

ERRATA.

Page vi, line 3, *for* "around—it" *read* "around. It."

Page 54, line 21, *for* "there?" *read* "there."

Page 159, line 10, *for* "infinity" *read* "infinitely."

Page 185, line 14, *for* "his shoulder" *read* "her shoulder."

Page 262, line 8, *for* "goats" *read* "goat."

Page 277, line 11, *for* "windening" *read* "widening."

Page 281, line 2, *for* "slept in" *read* "sleep in."

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ON THE WILD.

ON THE WILD.

Let him lie at my feet,
If thou wilt bury me. Wretch that I am
To give thee so much toil,—but thou seemest one
To whom such toil is dear. He was good nag
As ever raced along a morning path—
An honest loving nag—true to the death.
Thy dog hath pity on him, how he stares !
I tell thee with such horse and my poor harp,
And laughing faces listening round by times,
And first with limbs where the dear blood went right,
Not blackening all the sand, the world was pleasant.
Curse on those sons of Seth, and triple curse
On him their chief that thus must spill men's lives !
Curse on myself who—yet our kin are kin.
Were it to do again, it were the same—
If he would conquer, I would meet him still.
But, Stranger, I have loved earth as few love it,
Followed the brave sun over plain and hill,
Winding round snow-topped steeps, swimming broad
rivers,

A hand on saddle-bow, to the blue seas
That circle east and south—northward and west.
The cold winds drove me back—I love not cold
Nor icy mountains with their perilous depths.
Our tents were ever near the green and sun
When merry faces shared my wandering ;—
Then roaming on alone for years again,
Hearing no human sound but my own harp—
Thou smilest, yet my harp can speak to me,
Could speak—poor harp !

Yes, earth was very pleasant.

Yet have I had my hard times too—for days,
Aye weeks, with nothing but the sand to eat ;
Living through that who shall not live to-morrow.
That I who hated all their city walls—
Well, well—they were my kin—but for their cities
Now let them try what stones can do sans men—
If Seth might have been stayed, this arm had stayed
him.

We swept their horsemen from the field—no rider
Could show a mile beyond their phalanx'd strength,
And many a time our honest nags pierced through
Their own hot breasts upon those cursèd spears.
In vain—they were too many everywhere—
And still their leader's steadfast will pressed on
Into the bowels of the fertile land,

Till we set all upon a cast—and failed.
I gathered up our horses on a rise,
Reeking and bloody most of them, as day
Began declining in the west, and saw
Our stubborn line, like wounded boar, still hold
Its ground, too few to fly, but soon too weak
To stand, and our one chance his death who led.
It *was* our chance, and almost won. I tell thee
A horse is a grand brute when fairly ridden.
Thou hast seen mountain cataract ere now
Sweeping the stones to right and left,—so we
Burst through their crashing spears and shields and
helms
Until the standard of their king waved o'er me.
Then leaped I to my feet—cursed be the fool's
thought!—
And met him face to face. Had I but held—
Well, well—it was no child's play as it was.
These wounds tell thee the rest—yet even then
They did not leave me. Still I hear the trampling
Of rush of horses as they bear me out ;
Lifting me on my own poor nag again ;
With death behind—aye felt down every limb.
I scarce remember more. I rode straight on.
Why should I die in pent-up withered streets
Who knew my life was done and our cause lost,
And longed with longing none may know but men

Stricken as I, to breathe one mouthful more
Of pure breeze on the untrodden wild?—Stranger,
There are more powers on earth or in the air
Than we may guess of—else were I not here.
Yes, lay him at my feet—here I can die
In peace.

I loved her as I loved none other.
Or ere could love again, lived I more years
Than are the sands in yonder half-filled hollow.
See how they quiver with that passing breath
That nearly blows life into me!—I think
I loved almost as dearly as she hated,
Hated from day I bore her on my saddle
Out of her comrade's arms off to the plains.
It was rough wooing, but the girls were mad;
Or so I deemed. Last night I had a different
thought:
It is a desperate thing to love a woman
And have her in your power, while she hates you,
Shudders to hear your step, grows pale like lily,
More lovely in her bloodlessness and drooping.
I scarce could tell thee all I did to change her—
Made songs and sang them till the poor strings
ached,
Dragged her about to see fine sights, wept, cursed,
And tore my hair—did all but beat her sometimes.

In vain. I might as well have wooed the moon
there—

She grew as cold and white and thin as it.

At last the evil spirit rose in me,
And, leaping on my horse one day, I left her.
I knew it was starvation, but I left her,
Facing for south—when, on the path before me,
Glistening amid the morning dew, there lay
A skull-like stone that grinned with human pain—
All ashy grey :—I think I see it now—
And with it came the thought of her sweet face
Growing thus in death from me ; and, turning round,
I galloped back again, and swung her up
Before me, sweeping through the noontide blaze,
And left her at her city-gate that eve.

I never saw it since save in my dreams ;
But all last night I heard her voice praying,
And, Stranger, there was *love* in it at last.

Now let me sleep—to-morrow we will speak
Again.

A MESSENGER.

"Giants were upon the earth in those days."

GENESIS, chap. vi. verse 4.

PERSONS.

<i>Of the Tribe of Seth,</i>	{	ADURAM THE KING, . . .	} <i>Men.</i>
		SETH,	
		SHIRAS,	
	{	AZRAH,	} <i>Women.</i>
		LIAH,	
<i>Of the Tribe of Cain,</i>	{	HEBER,	} <i>Man.</i>
		MELCHAH,	
		SELLAH,	

Act I.

SCENE I.

A River-bank.

MELCHAH and HEBER.

HEBER.

The shadows tremble on the wave,
The leaves in the sun-mist, and still afar
The liquid gladness glimmers down the land,
Like happy days to come for thee and me,
My Mother.

MELCHAH.

Nay, ere it hath reached our bank,
Yon fair show may be dark enough.

HEBER.

No cloud
Edges the light that gleams in summer spray
Through all the upward green. Mother, the air
Is water of the sky, and birds float through it.

Think'st thou they see its waves as I see them
In the bright mornings when I bathe ?

MELCHAH.

I know not.

It well may be air hath a grosser sense
For them than us.

HEBER.

The old man said, in Heaven
We too may fly—I think I would rather swim
And be a man.

MELCHAH.

Man thou shalt be for ever,
Though of a substance light as birds it may be.

HEBER.

Then could I never heave a stone. I passed
The farthest mark to-day by a whole yard ;
And mine stood first ere that.

MELCHAH.

Son, dost thou grieve
We followed not their tents across the plain ?

HEBER.

To be their slave, and hear ' the son of Cain '
As ' son of dog ' ring in my ears for ever.
If Cain sinned, 'twas not I ; though his perchance
The strength that threw each railer as I listed.
I grieve not either to be here with thee
Or be myself.

MELCHAH.

And yet our father's blood
Now serves o'er all the earth.

HEBER.

Where are the sons
That should be, e'en as I, o'er all the earth
To guard our sisters and men's age ?

MELCHAH.

Alas !

Then how can joy come to our loneliness—
Or come to thine—for I am happy now ?

HEBER.

And I, yet would be happier. I wake
Oft in the morns with a vague feel of joy—
A strange sweet redolence of coming gladness,

More exquisite than aught the day gives yet ;
But not than it will give;—this but the sense
The perfect summer-time throws still before it.

MELCHAH.

Poor child ! Poor child ! now is the happy spring,
Ere long the autumn and the winter's gloom.

HEBER.

Ere long ! why, thou hast been for ever almost—
Yet do I see no face more fair. There take
The strings I stretched for thee,
and sing thy song
Of the sore-striving river. As thou singest,
The far-off joy will ripple to our feet.

MELCHAH (*sings*).

There is a voice in the summer wood,
A voice in the sultry air,
Of countless life that seeks for good
Through the green leaves everywhere.

The waters that murmur as they glide
Still strive and strive for ever,
And the thought that glances through their tide
Where the swaying flower-stems sever.

But the sweet buds break and flicker and fade,
And the cold night wind blows dreary ;
The white sand dries in the desert glade,
And often man is weary.

HEBER.

If half their tales be true, the southward King
And his young braves can have no weary time
Still banqueting flower-crowned by amber groves,
Or gilded halls and airy corridors,
While hands as slim as Jeschah's—

MELCHAH.

Peace! remember
That thou art free, and sully not thy lips
And my poor ears with all the tyrant's price
For that which makes men men.

Remember, too,
How he we would not follow, though of God,
Shadowed in fearful word the doom foreknown
Of earth for human cruelty.

HEBER.

Mother,
I am of Cain, and blood of mine thus serves.
I hate their King and them enough—fear not!
Besides, here I am King and thou art Queen.
All men are kings and queens where there are none.
Yet have I marked the strangely-bated breath
With which they speak of him—even in hate.
They have it that some star—but there are stars

For all of us—fires curiously far off.
I don't believe in stars—though some do move.

MELCHAH.

To give us light or glimpses of God's laws.

HEBER.

Scarcely for light; one moon were bright as all;
And surely God could make two moons as one;
Or let the sun be ever in the sky.
It is most strange how all things come to be—
Just as they are.

MELCHAH.

Most strange.

HEBER.

Ourselves the strangest.

I loved to hear the old man speak of these things,
But not as I have loved another voice
In the calm whispering of summer eves
That none might heed but I. How wise thou art!

MELCHAH.

Alas, I am most ignorant. I know
That God hath made us for His love—no more.

HEBER.

The earth and stars and all things in seven days—
It was no wonder He was tired.

MELCHAH.

Son, son,
There sometimes lurks a half jest in thy words
Still born of ignorance, yet deadliest sin.
It well may be for weary age on age
Poor toil-worn man will bless that rest of God,
Who ever rests indeed. Nay, look not thus!
I know it came not from thy heart—yet fear it!
My child, God speaks to us as we may hear,
Not as His voice is in itself.

HEBER.

Mother,
They say their father's father's father living
Saw Adam, the first man—'tis hard to think it.

MELCAH.

Yet, is it true?

HEBER.

Then listen. Hur and I,
I often thought to tell thee, but will now,
Would seek a fox's skin for Jeschah's stool,

And wounded one—I did—far on the hills.
It dragged my arrow through a hole at last,
By a steep brow, and as I clutched for it,
I grasped a bone and drew it out wondering ;
A long white bone, yet would not be so balked ;
But with our axes cut and flattened poles,
And forced away the clay to a strange space,
A sort of cave beneath the living rock
An upright stone had barred. Here lay our fox
Dying ; but here lay too, in grinning guise,
A very mass of bones, with dust or clay
Just sprinkled through them ; human bones ;
Hur had seen plenty such—poor bones of Cain—
But these mere puny things, unmanly, dwarfish ;
And in the clay we turned outside were stone knives
And axe and spear, all made half shapelessly,
And holed shells for a necklace. They were men
Who strung their circles once on that old hill ;
But silly little men that had no life
Like ours—men never known by Cain or Seth.

MELCHAH.

It well may be.

HEBER.

Yet was the world made first
For Adam in six days.

MELCHAH.

Poor child ! God's days
Are not as our days, nor His times as ours.
There is a legend that great Adam, driven—
I heard the story in these latter nights—
From Paradise ; wandering beyond the gates
In direst hunger and sore need of all things,
Came on a hut, or such it seemed, in woods
Where things like men had lived in ancient years ;
A low rude hut, with weapons strewed about,
Rough stones, and tools, yet ready to his wants.
He seizing these—there were no living things—
Began his outcast life, savage as they.
But mark the work of mind divine in man !
Those base wild huts have turned to gilded towers,
The rude flint axe to edge of gleaming bronze,
And the poor seeds of beauty in thy shells
To moulded forms so glorious, that fond men
Half worship in the gift their own strange power.

HEBER.

But when could they have lived, those ancient men ?

MELCHAH.

God knows—it may be never ; as the dust
That seems like melted leaves may just have been
The dust from the beginning—who may tell ?

God works all things in order ; so our frames ;
In corporal part the daughters still of men,
But by our souls the sons of the high God.

HEBER.

Then must the stone knives fallen Adam found
Have been from God himself—made by His hand—

MELCHAH.

Or made by soulless life that shadowed ours.
And are not the sweet flowers made by His hand,
And the strange shells with wond'rous lines enlacing,
That thou wouldst fain entwine on some fair neck ;
The plain, the river, and the blessed hills,
The stars and firmament, our very selves,
Most things we see, and hear, and taste, and feel ;
Are not they all just made by God's own hand ?
My son, when thou canst know how thou thyself art,
Then doubt all wonders else ; till then obey.

HEBER.

The greatest wonder of them all art thou—
Thou and thy wisdom. There—give me a kiss.
I love to feel thee blow my cobwebs off ;
The bright thoughts, wavering from bough to bough,
As upward there ; I marked that fellow spin

Ever since yesterday. Thy meaning is,
That these rude stones were just the voice of God
Teaching the first true man. Well, so the green
Were cleaner green, without that rogue's false
glimmer.
But how came all the clay there, thinkest thou ?

MELCHAH.

Why, flesh is clay at last ; with it the lees
The air of myriad years must leave behind ;
No doubt there was some opening from the first,
If refuge-place, for breath.

HEBER.

I deemed it tomb.

MELCHAH.

Then should the tools be inside not without ;
More like the cave was thing we now conceive not,
Mere trace of Nature's wild apprenticeship.

HEBER.

And so perhaps am I—a later trace.
So grieve not when I dream of wine and bright eyes,
And all the luscious temptings of the king ;
If I must yield now, still the time will come
For perfect young men in the proper course.

MELCHAH.

If not in thee, then never more for me
Who lives in him who mocks me and himself,
That better self, who heed not are accursed.
Women were given to men to be their friends,
True comrades each to each, not wine-lees staining
The strong feet of the youth who trample all things,
Right, virtue, reverend age, and their own manhood.
I would rather see thee dead than serve the King,
Thee who shouldst serve thy God !

HEBER.

Mother, Mother !

I wonder will the world have ere again
Another such as thou ! Perhaps the woods
And their deep silent noons have their own shadows
That mirror back the thought that looks on them
In human loneliness with purest tint
From the unbroken sky ; thus truthfulness
Must be with thee a fugitive on earth.
Were they not very lonely those first years ?
Poor, poor Mother ! think not thy words are lost,
Though I may laugh where sometimes I should weep.
It is my nature—what I think I think—
And speak to thee as the light words will come.
Give me the harp—now while the fit is on me
In dream from thee !

[*He sings.*]

Was whisper o'er us
Of thought being the world ;
Where our fates loom before us
Like banners furled ?
Some seize theirs nobly,
Fling them out to the sky,
Never leave field ignobly,
But silent die ;
Though in desert only
Where come and part
Round the strong man lonely
The strifes of heart.

If such were near us,
May it whisper still—
Still teach and cheer us
Of stubborn will,—
To be brave and loving
And just and true,
Never light-roving,
Oh, Mother, from you,
Till the endless ever
Be gained at last,
And none may sever
Us from our past.

Look ! as I live, a speck
That grows on yonder water—mark where it
turns !—
I watched it as I sang.

MELCHAH.

What must it be ?

HEBER.

I know not, yet would guess it hollowed trunk
Like mine, and guided by some human will,
Not flitting as a waif upon the tide.
See where it comes at the next bend—a man !

MELCHAH.

Oh, let us fly !

HEBER.

What—from a single one ? Mark how he keeps
The central current ever ; just below him now
Are sunken rocks for fathoms. See, he takes
The waters on the farther side.

MELCHAH.

Alas !

Why does he come ? Perchance he but the first,
And many follow—let us hide ! It may be
He will pass us in the trees !

HEBER.

Scarcely the hut ;
Yet crouch we as we watch ; just such a skiff

As ours—less pointed where the gentle flow
Breaks as it floats—more roughly cut throughout,
With all the length unpeeled ; a mighty man.
I see the huge square of his shoulders now,
And the half-careless sweep on either side
That makes the great tree swerve ; just such a one
As stood against a hundred, Mother, once
For thee and me.

MELCHAH.

His cheek was smooth as thine,
While a great mane waves on yon oarsman's breast.
And yet I mark no silken sheen or gold
As might be theirs who serve the southward King.

HEBER.

He was of Seth, but his good brother's love
Was of our kin, and he fought for you all.
I would like to meet that man again. Mark now :
The sun is full upon the face—a bold one—
More bold than grave ; yet grave almost as thine.

MELCHAH.

Long years have written much if it be he.
Yet his the form, the garb, the height, the brow,
The very frankness of unconscious mien.
'Tis he himself ! oh call !—now as he passes.

HEBER.

Sir! sir!—I will go down to him.

MELCHAH.

(After a pause.)

Alas!

Why does he come? why did I stay him then?
We were so happy in our simple lives;
And now a strange foreboding fills my heart
That all things change at last.

[Enter Seth.]

SETH.

Why hast thou hailed me

MELCHAH.

Dost thou not then remember her, once saved,
Her and a babe, by the white city wall?

SETH.

And thou art she? How the old years come back!
The boy too hath thy likeness—now I mark—
A man almost; scarce could I answer him,
So all unused to words. How camest thou here?

MELCHAH.

For years our hut has been thus by the water.

Of late were tents here too of some who fled
From the great southern King and his strange gods.
Westward they went but yesterday.

SETH.

And I

Go south to seek that cruel King, and gods
Good men must fly from thus. What was their word?

MELCHAH.

Of towers of gilded clay touching the clouds,
And moulded forms more beautiful than life.
Children of Cain toil in their bonds all day.

SETH.

Some thought of this was mine; in thy old town
There is no living thing.

MELCHAH.

The young men riot.

He gives them all their will, and they obey
To death.

SETH.

While their old age?

MELCHAH.

Fare not so well;

Yet have as slaves our broken veterans
To dig their wells and water in their fields.
The Lord's hand hath been heavy on our race.

HEBER.

Our fathers' hands were heavy on our race ;
The Lord hath made us straight enough and strong.

SETH.

Thou sayest well ; man works in all the ill ;
And angel lives have been of Cain. Nay, now
I marvel not your friends have fled.

HEBER.

Yet flight
Is flight. I would rather nor have fled nor
served.

SETH.

Again well said ; the Lord is with thee, boy !

MELCHAH.

Who now hath sent thee for his counsellor
To shape the life once saved.

SETH.

Nay, I must on.
Before me lies the river and the goal

That still hath called me through the weary years.
How often have I watched the summer nights
through—
I and my dogs !—God's gift to lonely man.
Now they are dead, and I know times are full.

MELCHAH.

And whither goest thou, and why ?

SETH.

To do
His will who made me and who loves. My purpose
Will shape itself as time may mould. It must be.
There are in yonder hell who still are human.
If not—why, I will be His single witness.

HEBER.

Not single, if thou wilt have me with thee.

MELCHAH.

Oh son, what hast thou said ?

HEBER.

But as thou teachest ;
Perchance my kin will love the child of Cain.

SETH.

Brave boy ! brave boy ! how the old years come back !

It seems but yesterday—not yesterday—
I saw a young face dark and bold as thine.

MELCHAH.

I loved it almost as I love the boy's,
And would have died ere I had felt its scorn ;
Who felt it not, but might have felt ; thinking
Him too my solace through the years that now—
But we forget our duty. Honoured sir,
In yonder hut is spread our humble fare,
Deign share with us to-night our evening meal.

SETH.

Nay, I have eaten. Let us sit, I pray you ;
'Tis long since I have heard a friendly voice.
And now as drops the reddening sun disclose
The mellow lustres of an hour I love.
It is a great joy to have met again !

HEBER.

From this soft moss we see the vale afar,
And all the shining length of river. Sir,
Was she not fair, that daughter of the King,
Of whose strange strength my mother often speaks ?

SETH.

Most beautiful ! And yet a younger face

To me was fairer. As we sit I fancy
That lips long cold thus speak again. Their tomb
Is now a solitude.

MELCHAH.

As the great East,
That might have been rich hive of happy men.
We fell the last.

SETH.

Rent by the desert sea—
Thy town—from all of Cain except its sin.
Moloch hath been poor god. It chanced I journeyed,
As was my wont, to seek its filling walls,
Where still young mothers trembled for their babes,
When, as my path wound out upon a brow,
I marked, much wondering, long lines of bronze
And crested horses gleaming with red gold,
And camels laden sombrely, that southward all,
With pinioned bands between, swept far below.
Already had some echo of the great King
And Seth's strange madness, conquering but to serve,
Reached even me ; and as I gazed I knew
It was the spoil of thy old town that passed,
And knowing longed to save for olden sakes,
Yet knew not theirs the spirit of their race,
And vain one human arm against a host ;

So watched all from above pass from my sight,
Young girls on camels, but the hapless old
In dismal lines forced ruthlessly along,
Till the last turned, and I went slowly down
Through all the blood-stained solitary streets.
Within the walls men lay like fallen fruit ;
Mercy had had its dagger-thrusts for them ;
But soon a groan of woman's agony
Drew me within a door where stretched there lay
Two aged forms writhing in pain and thirst.
I found a spring undimmed by the red trickle,
And gave them both to drink, and so passed on
To others such as they, till as the light
Grew golden in the west, a wretched one
Clung to me in her death pains ; when a tramp,
A sudden tramp of horses clattered round,
And almost with the sound a man in gold,
Made brighter with the glow, stood at the door
As young as thou, but all in gilded bronze.
He stood, amazed—at me I thought—who rising
Half drew my sword ; seeing beyond him still
The heads of many more, yet none like him.
' Art thou of Cain ? ' he said. ' No, son of Seth,
Herdsman, who wandered hitherward by chance.
This woman dies ; 'twere well it were in peace.'
' For this then thou art here ? ' ' For other end
I came, but stayed to serve.' So answered I,

And marvelled at the wonder in his face.
Ere turning, he would bid his men depart,
Not sorry, it may be, to leave my sword ;
But he gave it no thought, and came again
Ere yet his horsemen trampled from the town—
A comely youth—and asked me to be friend
To a king's son. I said I had no taste
For kings, and that my dogs would starve without me,
And so we parted, but were friends, I think,
In spite of all. If faces do not lie,
That youth has much of good in him.

MELCHAH.

Nay, had ;

For he is dead.

SETH.

Dead ! Why, his brow was young
As that brow there.

MELCHAH.

Yet hath the Lord God struck him ;
Or struck the sire, it may be, in the son.
They say the King has not smiled since.

HEBER.

And tomb

Reared o'er his bones of gilded brick will vie
With our low hills.

MELCHAH.

Son, son, we must not tire
With these poor tales that scarce have certain source.

SETH.

Nay, I would hear all tales of whither I go.

MELCHAH.

We have them from our friends, who heard but
rumours
Dimly mirked out. Yet, is it true the King's son
Is dead ?

SETH.

May peace be with him ! Death is the end
Whither we all are hastening. As we speak,
The evening gentleness steals over all things.
I heard a young voice once that sang of such.
No breeze will quiver more among the reeds,
Or shadow circle on that wave to-night.
Now is the hour that spirits speak with men
Of peace eternal. Thrice have I seen
The last soft glory on my father's tomb
Stretch out before me in that very river,

But ever flowing southward, and far down
A golden tower fading in the sky.
He smiles—well, well. They ever smile who see not.
Yet do I love that water at my feet ;
It is my fellow voyager.

HEBER.

And mine

That shall be.

SCENE II.

A Portico in the Palace of Aduram the King.

SHIRAS, AZRAH, and LIAH.

SHIRAS.

Within, in double row,
The stately forms of thirty ancestors,
Mysterious number, born of moon and sun,
With date and action graven underneath,
Gaze ever in divine serenity.

AZRAH.

Thirty! Why, that is ten beyond our outmost
Limit.

SHIRAS.

Yet would they else have been too few
By full ten statues, jarring well-tuned eye
With keen injustice;—now their even lines
Harmoniously can smile for evermore.

LIAH.

And no man doubt their kinship evermore,
So curiously alike in heavenly stare.
If one was ancestor, I would swear to all

SHIRAS.

Being all and each thy worthy sires and god.
Princess, that vague impassiveness of mien
Sets off the central figure of the shrine.

AZRAH.

But surely men will know they are not real ?

SHIRAS.

Pardon ! Our admirable Priestesses
Have so enlarged their minds, they will believe
In any fair amount of gods, while wine
Is wine. It is a curious study, Queens,
What men believe on proper inspiration.
I do expect a taste in ancestors
Will thrive with us better than cult of snakes.

Yet was the fancy neat and business-like
That wrote the dates and acts beneath. The
thought
May be improved on, but is mine. O Queen !
They are most real—real as the beautiful
Or pain. I know no pleasant truth but beauty.

LIAH.

Pray, is that compliment for her or me ?

SHIRAS.

When thou wouldst praise my winged horse to-
day,
It seemed to me both smiled.

LIAH.

Doubtless, being horses,
We had not smiled if their great mouths praised us.

SHIRAS.

Thou art too cruel—yet the sting is sweet,
Thus giving life to my poor handiwork.

LIAH.

Most strange life to a horse ! I had not said it
Of my divine progenitors—they seemed
Beyond such thing as praise.

SHIRAS.

Being, as I said, gods
And ancestors of thine.

LIAH.

Nay, if their godship
Must have such stare, I would rather be a woman.

SHIRAS.

A girl, fair Princess! not quite woman yet.

LIAH.

Now do I know for whom thy sweets were meant.

AZRAH.

A truce to this! What are thy purposes
For our to-morrow's great solemnity?

SHIRAS.

At early dawn all gather in the square;
And when the lifting splendour of the day
Shall pour its fulness on the open portal,
The winged horse, and these most mighty forms
Of kindred gods that line the temple through,
The King himself, while choral music thrills
Through every heart, must draw the veil aside

That hides the central figure of thy son
From the wide crowd on bended knees adoring.

AZRAH.

It is well fancied, but it cannot be.

SHIRAS.

Not be!

AZRAH.

Thou mayest not count upon the King,
Who neither quits his chamber nor his gloom.

LIAH.

He says the lie is too ghastly.

SHIRAS.

Ghastly! Saw he
The moulded beauty of that face,—the true face
But to divine lines perfected! Ghastly!
And yet I half expected it were so.
In Pleasure's name, is the King sick of reigning
That he must still play mope on such a day?
I tell you that the people like it not.

AZRAH.

It is most true—a hundred times I have said it.

See I myself have put my grief aside
In so far as it mars our people's joy.
The people love not an abstaining king ;
Even when blood may flow, each feels himself
To live but when their king despises them.
Then all men know the smart.

SHIRAS.

And pleasure too.
The King has best that they can give.

LIAH.

And think you
That words like these will draw the King, my father,
To-morrow from his solitary gloom ?

AZRAH.

They would be vain. She speaketh but too truly.

SHIRAS.

Then thou must be the King—the King and Queen ;
'T will lend a softer lustre to the hour,
And grace our hymn with some well-found allusion.

AZRAH.

It may not be. Where the King stays, I stay.
Let Liah lead the festival—I will it.

LIAH.

Alas, poor me ! so I must be joy's Princess,
At this my brother's. What do you call it, sir ?
Scarcely his funeral ?

SHIRAS.

That keen, keen tongue !
Would that I had it to shape forms of diamond,
Or some bright substance as endurable.
Now when I call my plastered work eternal,
I feel a lie as ghastly as thy father's.

LIAH.

In one thing thou art honest, Shiras—one—
And for that one endurable. Thy art
Has a true servant.

SHIRAS.

Being the one true thing
With beauty, its sweet mother.

AZRAH.

It is hard
That I, who served the King so faithfully—
Oft swaying to his will the surly mass,
With that same beauty that thou vauntest so,
When his bronze strength had been too weak for all—

That I must feel my work and self thus cast off.
His reign is *my* statue that he now throws down,
With this unbending gloominess of soul,
This dreary show of carelessness for all things.
Thou knowest, Shiras, that the people's love
Was still with me as Queen, as with the King.

SHIRAS.

Nay, more ; men love not well to serve a king.
There is instinctive outcry of the heart
At the bare thought, that needs much love or
fear,
Or hate or pain, to quell it utterly—
It is so mean to bow to strength alone.
But when a lovely woman claims obedience,
What manly breast but longs to be the carpet
Her gentle foot may sweetly rest upon ?
There is no man but loves thee dearly, Queen.

AZRAH.

Except the King—to him I am as nothing.
If on my bended knee I would beseech—
Well, well, it matters not ! When I am sought
for,
They will find me in the chamber with my girls—
Or girls that *should be* mine. They stay for me.

[*Exit* AZRAH.]

LIAH.

Shiras, beware !

SHIRAS.

What is thy meaning, lady ?

LIAH.

Thou knowest it as I. I will not betray,
But laugh ere long when thou art crushed.

Farewell !

[*Exit* LIAH.]

SHIRAS.

I thank thee, pretty railer ! for the threat.
It was but yesterday she said the King
Loved me as he has loved his puppy-dog
That had no fellow—loved me for my gifts—
The power within myself that is but mine ;
But if I crossed his path—will not betray,
Perhaps might help a little—who can tell ?
It is no marvel that he loves her not—
So fair a face—so keen, so hard a heart.
His puppy-dog ! I, almost strong as he,
If heads were counted—even from the Queen's.
Her price is just one life—to work her will
On one poor human lot. And must she have it ?
Without me she is powerless—I from her.

Why do they hate, these women, as they hate ?
I hate no man—I, but a puppy-dog,
Being thus a man indeed for joy and rule.

(Enter SELLAH.)

SELLAH.

Where is the Queen ?

SHIRAS.

How should I know, fair one ?

SELLAH.

They told me she was here.

SHIRAS.

What would you with her ?

SELLAH.

The King has bade me forth, and she will miss me ;
And missing may be grieved.

SHIRAS.

It is in vain.

SELLAH.

What is in vain ?

SHIRAS.

This most demure submission.
If I were you, Sellah, I made some friends.

SELLAH.

And even now I strive to make all friends.

SHIRAS.

In vain we would soothe the night-shade while we
drink it.

SELLAH.

Nay, if you deal in puzzles I must go.
This last eve do I strew the Prince's rest
With wreaths and flowers;—at to-morrow's dawn
The King himself will bear him to his tomb.

SHIRAS.

Beneath that mass that doth offend the sky
With its bright strength and squarely-compassed
lines,
It was most strange to choose to-morrow.

SELLAH.

At dawn

The King, with a small mourning band, himself
Will bear the corse to that last resting-place.

SHIRAS.

To-morrow, when I make a god of him.
Sellah, you loved the boy. Look well to-morrow,
The living face was mean to that of clay.

SELLAH.

It was the heart was god-like, and I fear
You cannot give the father back the heart.

SHIRAS.

Nay, but he has the Queen and the fair Liah's,
Who love you so—both, Sellah—quite too dearly.

SELLAH.

I strive to do my duty to the Queens.

SHIRAS.

Doubtless ; and they will give you pleasant guerdon
Some bright day of their power. If I were you
I made, as I said, friends. The King may die.
These gloomy broodings have a marvellous gift
To lift a strong man tombward. Look you now :
I want a model for a hunting goddess.
That tunic would just fit, and a light quiver.
For something in your Cainish blood would suit me—
I mean in blood once held to be of Cain.
What time our gracious monarch's most divine—

Now let me see—say thirteenth ancestor
Had not quite yet become a god, your Cain
Was just an ancient dream, Sellah; the real thing
Was our Divine's divine progenitor.
Still, blood miscalled of Cain has a dark eye,
And slim elastic form would suit my huntress,
As the great Queen's might smile goddess of love;
So if you come, dagger and all—I mean
No harm—I will be friend, Sellah, to death.
The King will grant just as you wish. Come to me,
And be my huntress for a friend. Remember
You will want friends by-and-by.

SELLAH.

Not now;

My heart is heavy for the Prince, nor ever
Without my mistress' leave; the King is good,
And I will give no cause for anger.

SHIRAS.

Fool! fool!

They hate you—both the women—and their hour
Will come ere long. I would have stood to you,
So help me, this good cunning hand!—stood to you;
But now—well, well. I wish you no great harm—
Not even now.

Act II.

SCENE I.

The River-side above the City.

SETH.

Why cannot I sleep thus? Yet sleep is death—
Death of the will, for which alone man lives;
And they are servants too. Were Amos with them,
He had enraptured both their hearts ere now
With echo of eternal melody.
From that great hymn I heard the desert singing
Through all the years, and yet may find no voice for
I who will speak of dogs, and boats and strength,
And good sword one to ten—things the youth loves
Perchance too well. He almost mocked at me—
Or would have mocked were it not I that spoke—
When with my blundering words I strove to tell
Of visioned river floating from my view,
Now real at my feet. Yet a brave boy,
And worthy of the truth and better teacher.
Strange! strange! to think the few who walk the earth
That know the goodness of our Lord and God—

The angels know it, and Himself He knows it—
The Eternal Three that are for ever One.
But men that He has made with thinking hearts,
Just buy and sell and strive, as if this earth
Bounded the universe. And I can't speak,
I, who have learned to feel in the lone hours ;
Ay, feel the joy of this soft eastern ray,
Faint image of His love's returning smile,
Now dimly gilding through the topmost green,
That soon will light the water at my feet ;
The ever-journeying water that, far down,
Pours out, they say, into immensity.
Were it not wonderful to drift and drift,
Finding my dears perhaps in some bright island ?
Find them ! Why, they are with me even now
On this awaking morn—with me for ever.
And scarce can there be island in the sea
More rich in green and wave and gold
Than yon leaf-swaying river with its spire
Of far-off gleam, and all these draperies
Of clinging purple stretched from stem to stem,
As by some cunning hand, till swimming gaze
Is drowned at last in depths of flowery verdure.
Ay, with me even now, to help and guide
Through yonder Devil's reign of glittering sin.
It well may be there are in that great hive
Some suffering hearts that do the good they know,

And long for help—such help as I can give—
The help of a strong arm and honest will.
Oh ! if there are, dear Lord, Thou knowest I am Thine;
Grant me to save Thy little ones, the souls
That Thou wilt ——

Ha ! what solemn sound is this ?

A strange dim burst of music through the trees ;
Surely of music, though with little joy
In all its measured chant. Joy ! Nay, it robs
The paling heart of joy. Waking up dream
Of utter loneliness, and grief, and languor ;
Yea, giving death itself a sterner gloom,
As though it came in slow decline and want,
Missing the joyousness of battle's front.
I almost grow a coward as I listen,
And long to be with my poor flocks again.
Surely a strain ill-wedded to such grove
On such a morn as this ! Still, down the trees,
Might I not force my way through yonder thicket ?
And so—a sound ! a step !

(*Enter SELLAH.*)

SELLAH.

Sir, tarry not
Upon this ground—it is private to the King ;
And even now they bear his son in death
Who once within its fair groves loved to linger.

SETH.

His son ! For him then rose that lonely chant.
I pr'ythee, was he tall and fair, with locks
Of yellow gold down-flowing ?

SELLAH.

Even thus,
A manly picture of the Queen, his mother.

SETH.

Then death hath seldom chilled more comely form.
Maiden ! my fellow-voyagers still sleep.
We are but strangers who last night dropped down
Here with the river. Gladly would I know
Where we in peace may tarry.

SELLAH.

From this garden
The bank is free. But by the city gate
There is a hall where wanderers still may bide
A week at the King's cost.

SETH.

That scarce may suit us,
Who would not be indebted to a King
Who teaches sons of Seth to serve strange gods.

SELLAH.

The great King cares but little for the gods.

SETH.

No man is great who cares not for our God.

SELLAH.

But he, of men, is King—all others serve.

SETH.

Nay, all should serve who would be kings indeed.

SELLAH.

Thou mockest me. And yet, I pray thee, hasten ;
It were not well to be encountered here.

SETH.

I did not mock—nor yet will owe thy King
The shelter of a roof; the more as they
Who share my wandering—mother and youth—
Are both of Cain.

SELLAH.

Of Cain! and yet a youth!
Oh, sir, this is no place for child of Cain.
The meanest beast that toils for careless man'
Hath more of human lot. Wake them and fly.

This is no place for them. I speak who know.
Our old men toil under the lash. The girls—
Alas! of all, I only serve no god;
And wear my dagger thus—dagger that freed me,
Thanks to the King and the King's son!

SETH.

The King!

SELLAH.

Even the King, who heard of wound self-given,
And so would ward their hideous servitude
From one who dared to die.

SETH.

A wound self-given,
And all alone. Oh! maiden, let me love thee
As brother, father, ever loyal friend!
In the old years some such as thee I loved,
And earth has been most lonely since they went.
Now our good God hath sent again the joy,
And with me here are two of thine own blood.

[*Enter MELCHAH.*

See, even with the word the mother comes!
Melchah, behold a sister, child of Cain!
Who would have died not to have served their gods,
And meets us first on this unholy shore.

Where is the boy? I think that he will mock
No longer the great Hand that is with all,
And over all.

MELCHAH.

He left me even now
To bathe, it may be, in the upper stream ;
But let me greet for him and me, fair child !
And love, if I may love, in humbleness.

SELLAH.

Oh, lady, that I might be servant of thine,
Who long to serve good woman of my tribe !

MELCHAH.

Alas ! how dost thou know that I am good ?

SELLAH.

I feel it ; nay, I see it in thy face.

SETH.

Mother and daughter, let it be for ever !
But of this strangest King—How could such ill
strength
Have met so fair a use ?

SELLAH.

The King is brave,

And loves the blood of men in hard-fought field ;
And some will say is cruel in his rage.
I ever found him kind. I think of late
He lived but in his son.

SETH.

And he was good ?

SELLAH.

Most good ! Such little ease as have Cain's children
They owe the King through him. He loved the
world,
The speed of horses, and the swing of oars ;
The gentle shade at noon ; books, games, the river ;
But loved not human pain.

SETH.

Nor yet the sin

That feeds on it !

SELLAH.

In all things but a youth,
That grew each day more just. He and his father
Would often journey forth alone. Of late
The King has tired of splendour.

SETH.

Thus sore-stricken

At once by loss of having that he loved,
And loving that he has.

SELLAH.

He loves not much.
But now, I pray you, linger not. It were ill
Should many find you here.

SETH.

I had forgotten.

SELLAH.

Ere yet the city be half reached, some walls
Where once a house for lated travellers stood
Will give you shelter ; there I will seek you soon.
Meanwhile, I pray you go not through the town,
For there is highest festival to-day,
Whose sights could but offend ; and it were dangerous
For you to worship not, as all must worship.

SETH.

Nay, had we shrank from danger, we had scarce
Been here ; yet, if by burrowing patiently
We might have help from thy down-trodden tribe,
It were most well to take no rasher open ;
It may be chastisement has cleansed their hearts.

SELLAH.

Oh, count not on them ! they are mean and broken
Beyond thy very thought ; cruel at heart
As those that trample them. Pray, trust them not.

SETH.

Then will I walk thy streets to-day, and with me
One of thy race, who is nor mean nor broken.
If man will lay a hand upon us, why,
Let him look to it !

SCENE II.

A Funeral Chamber.

ADURAM.

Is anything beyond this mask of death ?
This shrivelling of the faded scroll that holds
The marvellous thought of man ? Does a thought
die
When the poor signs that symbol it in words dissolve,
Leaving no dust behind ? Then is this dust
The one real thing ; and hope, reflection, love
Just phantoms, flickering on its single truth.
Yet, when I read a thought, it lives to me ;

My life is richer by it, though no atom
Has been transferred to my corporeal frame,
With that which were the lines blurred should be
nothing,
That which will often strike like lightning-flash
Mocking the slow will labouring into words.
Such was the sage's argument of old,
That thoughts were never of material atoms ;
Since atoms, with their force and properties,
Attracting, drugging, swaying, what we will,
Through other atoms, ever form one whole,
Unchangeable through all its changing parts ;
While universe of thought may fade to-morrow ;
If every book were burned, were halved to-morrow,
Yet no thing be returned to our gross world.
No doubt the water will take strangest forms
Congealed by cold. Are these like human thoughts,
The products of the human brain ? Not so ;
The thoughts are in the scroll ; but properties,
If properties not of the scroll but brain.
Yet is there no brain there ? Now, let me think !
The water chills ; and chilling marks the earth.
Are then these marks like human thoughts ? They
are not.
They are a property of clay marked by iced water ;
Being, in very truth, the clay's extension
Or form, without which property it was not.

But are the thoughts the scroll's form or extension,
Or character, in written tale its colour ?
Not so. There is no parity between the two.
I dream a tale ; then is that tale a thing,
A real entity ! I pass it on ;
And other minds are fuller for it ever,
Until the page is marred, when all seems lost.
It may be matter is the prison wall
On which the shadows flit of spirit truth
From prison casement dimly struggling down ;
And with its waste comes the soul's liberty
And vision evermore. This may be true.
But is it true ? I know not. No, nor even
That matter is unchanging ; but it feels true.
The water makes the steam, the air the water.
If one poor cup of liquid might grow nothing,
Fade into utter emptiness, why not
This strong-bound earth ?

Yes, matter surely lasts.

But does the thought of man last ? Who may tell ?
I know not. I who would give kingdom, wealth,
Strength, glory, all I have, for one poor word
In his own voice from that unheeding stone,
To prove that he and I may meet again.
Who could not share the knowledge of ourselves,
Sharing all else that mocked us without that.
Is there no power around, above, below,

A spirit power that now will answer me,
Being spirit of that spirit-land they know ?
The sons of Cain had gods they worshipped strangely,
Not our mere forms of beauty, but weird beings
That spoke by prodigy and cruel sign.
If such there be, now let them speak to me !
If blood may move them, I have shed enough ;
Most of their votaries ; but that they loved,
Or their rites redly lied. Let them give sign
That they have life as I ; take hideous form
Here, 'neath this solid dome, that marks my power,
If such be theirs, of everlasting horror.
A form to make man's startled eye-balls strain,
And rouse his stiffening locks. I fear them not ;
Who fear of all things most life without hope ;
Sick unto loathing of the cruel pomp
Of feast and gold, and slavish heartless girls.
Now, let them come, if they are truths indeed !
There is no answer. Could there be an answer
Here by his form, who hated them and theirs ?
Oh, rather if there be another life
With beings good as he, life now his own ;
In spirit-world of thoughts all good like his ;
Who shudder at the evil deeds of men.
Then, in their goodness, let them look on me—
A father almost maddening for his son—
And give me some dear sign that he still lives ;

That, though my eyes may see him not, his thought
Still clings to mine; that, when the fleshly wall
Is rent at last, as this great upward mass
Might even now dissolve, an endless day
And his dear love may meet my raptured sense.
Some trust like this he had—let it be mine,
And I will face my dreary life again
In hope to live it out as he would live it.
What have I here? A rent above me thus,
Through all the solid mason-work, a keen rent,
Scarce wide as a sword's cut, yet deep, it may be,
By fathoms. Was this some foul play of the
slaves,
Whose heedless toil raised the quick pyramid?
Now, by my head, I will have their tortured
frames——
Soft, soft. What did I say but now? A sign!
Surely the fissure was not there till then!
Fool! fool! to let my fancy cheat me thus.
My mind is sick with grief. It were poor sign,
A little crack in haste-cemented wall.
Yet, was it strange I saw it not before?
It had been better that great stones upheld
The mass, huge as this central burial coffer,
That thus—why, as I live, a rent in it!
All things swim from my gaze that scarce—How
now?

(*Enter SELLAH.*)

SELLAH.

Thy servant craves thy pardon. May she speak ?

ADURAM.

Ever and always ; yet one moment, Sellah !

Did you not mark, ere now, this funeral stone ?

SELLAH.

Surely I marked it.

ADURAM.

And that line ?

SELLAH.

Not that ;

It was not there last night.

ADURAM.

Nor that above me ?

SELLAH.

Nor that ; yet have I felt no earthquake, Sire.

ADURAM.

Nor I, save in my heart. Your message, Sellah ?

SELLAH.

Scarcely a message, King ; two strangers wend
Amid the town, who will not serve the gods ;
They speak of other God who is not thine,
But goodness infinite. May they go free ?

ADURAM.

You should have bade them shun the throng to-day.

SELLAH.

The elder, when I spoke of death, said death
Was prize.

ADURAM.

Belike some aged fanatic.
I met such in my youth—shadows of men.

SELLAH.

Nay, stronger than thy strongest ; the strongest man,
Save thee, that I have seen.

ADURAM.

What would you have then ?

SELLAH.

Thy mandate to the guards that no blood flow
On this great festival.

ADURAM.

That you shall have,
And with it this my signet ring as token ;
As yet they will obey it ; aye, *as yet* ;
I would that you had asked for more, Sellah.
But for these strangers, keep account of them,
And let me hear what thing may chance.

[*Exit* SELLAH.

Thinks death

A prize ; and comes, aye, even with the sign
That shakes me thus. She saw it not. No one
Could see it. Now to be there evermore.
But for no other mind as now for me.
Strange how the teachings of old times come
back

Like far-off sunlight from a childish land,
Girt by a blood-red sea—come back to me,
Who made it circle there. All smells of blood.
I mocked their wisdom in the pride of lust,
That was my heaven, and so men trampled them ;
And now their fleshless limbs will drag me down.
And yet they taught forgiveness, as I think.
And even now this sign comes like a beacon.
Still will I strive ; for his sake will I strive,
Who from within seemed almost wise as they,
If it be truth.

Again a step. I thought

The path was strait enough to keep the crowd out.
The Queen !

(Enter AZRAH.)

AZRAH.

The Queen ! Perchance thou deemest other
Had better right to come to her son's tomb ?

ADURAM.

I have not said it.

AZRAH.

No; but looked, Aduram.
I have not lived upon those looks such years
Now to mistake their mood. There was a time
They gave me different welcome.

ADURAM.

Thy festival
Will lack its chiefest presence while thou art here.

AZRAH.

Where is the father, there may I be too.

ADURAM.

Nay, thine the temple ; mine is but the tomb.

AZRAH.

And which best honours him ? The sire who grieves
As if his lot were now below a slave's ;
Or she who bids a loving people hail
In their new god his last supremacy ?

ADURAM.

It is not wise to grieve, and yet I grieve.

AZRAH.

And I. Yet deem the world has still some joy
If thou wilt but be kind.

ADURAM.

Rather, if throngs
Will still but worship, as they worship now
Their Queen of joy.

AZRAH.

Nay, taunt me not with that ;
For thus I am most faithful to the King.

ADURAM.

Faithful ! Well, be it so.

AZRAH.

And dost thou doubt me ?

ADURAM.

Why should I doubt thee, Azrah ? Thou *art* Queen.

AZRAH.

And woman, with a heart that thou canst break.
If I am faithless, let me know my sin.
Alas ! my sin is but forgiving ever ;
And that I do forgive myself with thee,
Coming to crave some little crumb of love
From him to whom I gave my all. Alas !
Why must we meet and part in our cold halls
As if no summer's joy had e'er been with us
To bid the mystic tendrils grow, that frost
Should make yearn closer to each straining heart ?
O Aduram ! for our old happy days
Let me be still to thee what once I was.
Hard-hearted, cruel man, the iron turns
Never more truly to that wondrous stone
My father showed thee, than I turn to thee.
Now, by those olden times, when from his tower,
And your long midnight watch, I have hailed
both,
So oft returning ; I who watched the night through,
Thinking of thee, who thought but of the stars ;
Paid when thou lingeredst from the ancient man,
Some little yards with one kind word for me—
O Aduram ! for those old happy nights

In the dim mist of half-forgotten years,
Cast me not off! Befriend me—love me still!

ADURAM.

He was a good man—learned, and a wise;
And yet not better, as I think, than some
That thou and I have slain.

AZRAH.

Cold spiteful wretches,
Who grudged the reign of pleasure to the earth—
Pleasure that our great festival has scattered
In shower of joy upon this glorious morn.
From every roof gigantic scarfs of gold,
Silver, and lustrous silk wave through the air;
The fountains leap with jets of purple wine,
And in the southward gardens mystery,
The endless banquet half outlasts the green.
Even when we are sad, 'tis sweet to know
Our people thus enjoy.

ADURAM.

How many a slave
Has ached for it this month!

AZRAH.

No doubt; being slaves,
It was for that you fought and conquered them.

ADURAM.

How many a dying wretch will hear and grieve !

AZRAH.

And wherefore should they grieve at others' joy ?

ADURAM.

Thyself must answer that when thou art old.

AZRAH.

Nay, I *am* old. I do remember now,
When first my head lay on thy shoulder thus,
(My father saw, but would not seem to see),
Thou whispered'st in my ear : the universe,
With all its untracked wilderness of light,
Its bright abysses and resplendent orbs,
Had nothing half so fair as my slight form,
And the young spirit-life it held. O King !
For those old hours, and his sake whom I bore you,
Be once again my own ! My loneliness
Is sick with longing for one smile of thine.
Let us be true, if all the world be false !

ADURAM.

I cannot smile—nor here, nor anywhere.

AZRAH.

I pray thee, then, let me but help thee still !

Rest on thy massive bosom thus, yet feel
That thou, the mighty one, the King of Men,
Can lean at times by little shade on me!
Oh! I could tear them like a cub-robbed tigress.
Who would part us now—thy heart from mine?

ADURAM.

Nay; none

Can part us, Azrah, but thyself!

AZRAH.

Oh, say it

Again! again! let me but hear that word.
They once would say, when thou and I were joined,
The world itself might bow to such a pair.
No one shall part us more. Say it again!

ADURAM.

And who would part us, Azrah; thee and me?

AZRAH.

That sleek slave thou hast warmed in my chamber,
Whose viperous tongue can make thy heart so cold.

ADURAM.

Was it for this thou wok'st old memories—
Strange sweetness of the dreaming that nothing
Can give to thee or me again? For shame!

Nay, let us stand apart! Whate'er my fate
And thine, those dreams must soften me while dream
Is left. Thou wert the glory of my youth,
As he was of my manhood that lies here;
But *him* I tainted not. Look not so stern!
I take my fair share of thine evil, Azrah.
Perchance, if we had lived, we two ——. Enough.
Thou shalt not have the life of this poor girl
Except through mine. He loved her, and was glad
To have her care about his dying couch.
While I stand she must stand.

AZRAH.

But not with me—
Here in my palace. Let us be apart.

ADURAM.

I dare not trust her from me. Thou art strong,
More strong, perchance, than I know.

AZRAH.

Strong with thee.
And wilt thou fling me off thus for a slave?

ADURAM.

I save that good girl from thee if I can.
Nay, look not thus! Thou art sacred to me;

But if thy hive of worshippers upswarm,
Then, by my head, they shall have warmer welcome
Than I had thought to give again ! My sword
Hath somewhat—Tush ! But for that pleasure, Azrah,
There is no joy in seeing other's vice,
Save where it feeds our own ; but to see goodness,
Or hear or know of it, is truest joy,
Even when ourselves are beggars.

AZRAH.

So thou hast chosen
Between the Queen and her ?

ADURAM.

Thou threatenest safely.
But let another use that tone of thine,
And I will cleave him where he stands. Ay, were it
To still the defftest hand on earth !

And, Azrah,
Come not again within this chamber. Here
My rule is absolute—even for thee.

AZRAH.

I take the insult as 'tis meant, yet grieve
It has been given.

[*Exit AZRAH.*]

ADURAM.

Poor child ! poor child !

Her safety must be looked to if I fall,
And I have scarce the mind to strive. Or strive
For aught but knowledge—the one real good,
If good—my earliest mistress and my last.
Since common facts show common laws ; why not
A preternatural fact, a weirdly law,
Not stranger in itself, but strange to me ?
All things are mysteries I see and know ;
Myself, my fellow-men, our mother earth—
All strangest things that use hath made seem plain.
It is no greater wonder that this stone
Should split than that myself should be. Both prove
A Will distinct from man's, or seem to prove it—
To Whom the soul may live, as the poor thought
I learn lives in my heart, when the scroll fades
With whose dim characters it grew ; but seems—
For I am *certain* of no thing but self,
Taking all else as probable for me.
Yet can I deem not that this power of action
I feel within myself is less than dust,
But rather a great truth, while dust is the dream.
It may be even the strange powers of Nature
Are minds like to my own, whose wills are her laws,
For ever changeless in their constant round—
My son's, and such as his, now gods indeed ;

And yet I think it not—rather would deem
In death we find existence all unlike
The things that we have known or heard or dreamed
of—

Life without space, or time, or weight, or size.
Such is the old thought as it comes to me,
Across that sea of red. Adam, and Cain
And Abel, and the rest. I had forgotten it.
In laws I dreamed that I might understand;
In pleasure, wine, base women, and man's blood,
That there is One, All-perfect and All-wise,
Who hath devised our lives for infinite ends;
To Whom all just souls live for ever and ever,
Changeless from good, once seeing Good Supreme;
In whose great Hand the laws we deem unchanging,
Of this dull world that binds our darkened selves,
Are as the magic mirror's fabled light,
Still ruling each man's fate, yet still the same.
But if such Power there be, can I now kneel
Here by the bloodless body of my son,
And ask His pardon for the ill I have done,
I, Aduram the King? If He has made me,
Surely I owe Him homage? Yet not so;
If One hath made that is unworthy homage,
Why must the good oft grieve, and ill men thrive,
If being all-powerful, He too is good?
That was the argument, I do remember,

That turned my young life to myself and sin ;
The pain of lambs and women and poor babes.
I will not kneel to Him that He is strong,
As I would kneel not to the mightiest man,
Huge as the distant mountains, were there such,
But rather to some brave and loving child,
Who was as good as this poor girl of Cain.
If such there be, of goodness infinite,
Who made me to be good, who have been ill ;
Who loves my son, and sent even now that sign
To save me from myself,—then will I kneel
To Him. Yes ; I, the King !

SCENE III.

A Portico in the Palace.

SHIRAS and LIAH.

SHIRAS.

I thought the flash
Of those most heavenly eyes had slain them then.

LIAH.

Had I been man, they scarce should boast of me ;
Just two, and thus to outdare all !

SHIRAS.

Even gods !

But then, thy father's ring ! pray, think of that !

LIAH.

Had I been man, I had not thought of it ;
Or thought of, but to find excuse too late.
It is an evil thing to let sedition—
Or so I hold it, who am but a girl—
Thus thrive.

SHIRAS.

Thy throne is all unshaken, Princess ;
The two are two.

LIAH.

Amid a very host of slaves,
Who hate us dearly as we treat them.

SHIRAS.

Nay,

Who hate us rather less, being like themselves—
I speak in humbleness, and to my Queen—
Than they will hate these admirable boors.
When men would choose the base, they love not those
Would goad them to be brave, by being brave.
But see, where comes the Queen !

(*Enter AZRAH.*)

AZRAH.

How have things sped ?
I have heard strangest rumours as I come.

SHIRAS.

Scarce stranger than the facts. Two impious men
Outstood the kneeling crowd. Great unsmoothed
forms,
Impressive in their way ; one of Cain's blood,
As I would swear, a youth ; the other towering
Like mountain tree, in shaggy autumn-time.

AZRAH.

And so the people tore them limb from limb.

SHIRAS.

No, by thy sweet divinity they could not.
Some did essay the feat, but down they went
Like ninepins, from the giant's clenched blows,
Who never drew his sword.

LIAH.

But the youth did,
And his side was left free.

SHIRAS.

The Princess tells

Her part divinely. Such an eye and pose
I have seldom seen. It was most interesting,
Taken as sight ; the sun upon us all,
The choir, the Princess, and my wingèd horse,
That seemed to rival in their rooted strength
The angrier forms below.

AZRAH.

Then, with thy guards

Surely thou didst disarm them ?

SHIRAS.

Not quite then.

Of course we should, ere long, or else used arrows.
I thought of balistas ; but ere we quite
Completed our own minds, a message came
Straight from the King, that no blood should be
shed,
And we obeyed ; in fact, stood where we were.
I have seen a pack thus pause before a lion ;
Not run away, of course.

AZRAH.

And dost thou mean

That two, but two, could beard you thus and live ?

SHIRAS.

Nay, but the order of my Lord the King !

AZRAH.

And thou canst smile unmoved. Words are too weak
To tell thee all I think.

SHIRAS.

Now, for thy words
I care not, Queen ; but for thy sweetest self
I would not have thee moved thus needlessly—
The men are harmless. Two can be but two.
And in the mighty crowd there was not one—
Thinking of balistas, I looked the while—
That wished the strangers well. Pr'ythee, be calm !
E'en I forgive the brutishness that marked not
Divinity in my dear handiwork.

LIAH.

He mocks us, Mother ; yet I think the mocking
Should be with us. Let us, too, see these *men*—
It is so long since we have seen one else
But slaves and artists, and my father King.

SHIRAS.

Perhaps not artist marked alone the pose
And eye I spoke of then.

LIAH.

For once most bright,
Catching my very meaning, gentle sir!

SHIRAS.

So sweetly sharp, thy wit must fix itself.
It is no merit, Princess, that I caught it.
Yet would I rather catch thy smile ; and so
Will seek these excellent ruffians at thy wish.

AZRAH.

Then thou hast tracked their steps ?

SHIRAS.

Almost ; holding them
Far from unknown to the King's messenger.

AZRAH.

A most strange message, as I think. Who bore it ?

SHIRAS.

A graceful, dark-haired girl—sure child of Cain.

LIAH.

Play not the ignorant. It was Sellah, Mother !

AZRAH.

Now, by my heart, I might have guessed as much—
Sent by the King on such an evil errand,
No doubt well-planned.

SHIRAS.

Not all unknown they met,
Or my eyes failed.

LIAH.

An excellent observer!

SHIRAS.

Of beauty and of truth; or for them, Princess.

LIAH.

Witness thy acts and dates! But let us see
These *men*.

SHIRAS.

And not the gentle Sellah, Princess?

LIAH.

That shaft hurts her, not me. It was ill-spel.

SHIRAS.

Hurts! Then, indeed, I am unfortunate.

AZRAH.

Pray you have done ! Shiras, that girl must die ;
She is dangerous and very hateful to me.

SHIRAS.

Great Queen, thy will is law to half the city.

AZRAH.

And thine to half again. Let us be friends !

SHIRAS.

Nay, I am ever slave. But Queen, the King !
The King loves well the maid. Thou shouldst persuade him.

AZRAH.

E'en now I asked for justice, and have failed.

LIAH.

Another shaft ill-winged. Thou art most dull
To-day. I prythee let us know, good Shiras,
When we may see thy friends. Now, while thy
tongue wags,
Ere long it may have gone with thy poor head.
It's ill to strive between a man and wife ;
And when that wife is Queen, and not well-pleased,
It is dangerous.

SHIRAS.

Not with an ally Princess,
A fair, truth-telling ally, such as thou,
Who would not give up even a stupid friend,
If none were left to give her greater pleasure.
Besides, there is a band will break my statues
The day their master's hand is chilled. We men
Can trust each other, Princess. Fare thee well !
I seek these noble boors, and thou shalt see them.

Act III.

SCENE I.

A Boat moored in the River.

HEBER, MELCHAH, and SELLAH.

SELLAH.

My earliest thought

Is of a great green land of mighty trees,
And grass as reeds upon a river side,
Where luscious fruits hung ripening ; with child-girls
That played, and danced, and glimmered in the sun ;
While elder women grouped amid the trees,
Save one, most dear in pain, whom I called Mother.
I see her listening to the songs they sing,
More sweet than we sing now, with a pale patience
Upon her face, while I hold one poor hand,
Still thin and thinner till it is cold. And then
The great rain pours down from the clouds, and I
Am all alone upon the lonely earth,
Save for one little friend that sleeps with me.
And we two roam together in the woods,
Wondering at all the trees, and stars, and river ;

While others laugh at us, or laugh at her,
Who is a little drooping thing; but I
Am strong. And so the years and years go by,
Till she grows weaker, and I mark the look
Upon her face my Mother's had before.
And then I fall upon the earth and cry,
All by myself, lest she should know my pain.
Yet ere long she is wise, and whispers to me
That she has heard them speak, and gasping, sobs
She must not leave me; that she will not die:
No more to wander in the pleasant woods,
Or see my face, or hear my call for ever.
And then I soothe her, and she sleeps at last;
But I go out, and lie upon the clay,
Marking my red arms with my gnawing teeth,
Until a thought comes back I had forgotten.
And when she wakes again, I whisper to her
How my Mother told me, if I was but good
We two should meet in land beyond the clouds—
Word I had not remembered till that hour.
And she believes it, and grows sweet and calm;
And all the days she lives still breathes of it,
And makes me often promise to be good;
Never, never to will what I feel wrong,
That we may meet, we three, again. She told me
My Mother came to her in dream, but that
May have been sickness; yet, when she was gone

It was my comfort, and I thought it true.
And ever when I strive to do the good,
I think my little friend is by my side.
But now I tire you with my foolishness.

MELCHAH.

Go on, go on! I long to hear it all;
And I have bared our inmost lives to thee.

SELLAH.

Nay; there is little more. Rumours of wars,
And then our vale was swept, and we were slaves.
At first my mistress was an ancient dame,
Who spared me not in toil, but did no ill;
And afterwards. Oh, then, you know the rest.

MELCHAH.

Dear child! how happy were my years of life
Had they been shared by thee. Yet God knows best,
Who is the joy of that sweet land of thine,
And love of those who love as thou hast loved;
Who loves thee, Sellah, dearer far than me,
A sinner in my youth. Yet loves us all.

HEBER.

Nay, Mother, thine was not the sin. I know
No being on this earth is better than thou.

MELCHAH.

Peace, son! What have we done for our good God,
Or thou, or I?

HEBER.

Not much; but we will do
Somewhat, I hope. Now, ask her of the Prince.

MELCHAH.

Sweet child! all have their mission on this earth,
And thine is human charity. I speak
As one who teaches; but believe me, Sellah,
I rather learned of thee, and asked thy prayers.
Now, tell us of the Prince? He loved thee too.

SELLAH.

I think he loved my tending at the last,
Yet scarcely heeded me in his great father,
And thoughts I could not fathom. Dearest lady,
Would it were mine to serve thee with my life;
Of my own race—like my own Mother once.

MELCHAH.

Who longed not more for thee; but now this air
Reminds me of my evening housekeeping.
So, Heber, push the boat against the shore,
For I must leave you two to fish. Nay, Sellah,

He needs thy defter hands to bait his hooks ;
Remember both, I trust our meal to you.
Come in one hour. And now my first dear kiss ;
For this one eve, I *am* thy Mother, Sellah.
(*A pause.*)

HEBER.

Poor Prince ! His father loved him passing well.

SELLAH.

He was the earth to him ; the fearfulest thing
That I have seen was that dread father's face
Beside the body of his son.

HEBER.

And yet

He has the Queen ?

SELLAH.

Oh, yes, he has the Queen.

HEBER.

And daughter too ?

SELLAH.

And daughter too ! I praythee
Now let the skiff drop down to that slow curl.

I often marked the fishers from yon bank,
When I might steal me from the Prince's rest.

HEBER.

And was she very hard to thee, that woman?

SELLAH.

She made me work beyond my girlish strength.
But I have seen who suffered more than I.
In yon wide town are sights would make thy heart
 bleed.

HEBER.

I had rather that they made the tyrants bleed.
Oh! for one hundred young men of our race,
Or half—but half—to follow that brave man;
And we had pulled their temple on their heads
To-day. I almost thought he meant to try.

SELLAH.

But two against the multitude. Alas!
It were most vain.

HEBER.

He thinks not so. He holds
We are but dust in the great hands of God,
Who works in all His will. We can but make

Or mar ourselves, as we are true to Him.
While death for Him is highest joy of earth.
I might have smiled, if some mere preacher spoke ;
But heard with reverence one who saved my Mother
Alone against a crowd.

SELLAH.

How horrible
That old sin of our race !

HEBER.

Therefore are we two
The only free of Cain.

SELLAH.

I am not free—
The handmaid of the King.

HEBER.

Rather his friend.
I read thy history better than thyself,
And almost like that King of thine, Sellah.

SELLAH.

Yet has he been our deadliest enemy.

HEBER.

Not so. Our deadliest enemies were those

Who slew our boys ; save me, of all our blood,
There is no youth, unless some wild men roam
In far-off woods. Could I but deem it so,
And there were many such, I would search earth
To gather host to fight for our old name.

SELLAH.

The Prince loved tales of travel—being himself
A traveller ; and once I heard him speak
Of strangest tribes in a far western land—
Half men, half animals. The leaders, men ;
Old sons of Cain, perchance. The women, beasts ;
Just human forms, without our human hearts.
It was a curious tale.*

HEBER.

And yet like truth.
For I myself have met with these strange men,
Not in the flesh ; but bones of such, and tools.
I found them hunting one day I would seek—
In the far mountains. Thou hast seen moun-
tains ?

SELLAH.

Yes, in the clouds—great snowy, peak on peak.

* But I should think of no historical value.

In my own land, beyond the forest trees.
But for these men—could there be men with half
souls ?

HEBER.

Are there not idiots, just half souls ? Perchance
We may not judge of aught beyond ourselves—
Whose rule should be to do the good we know,
And leave all else to God. I think thou saidest
'Twas thus thy little friend once made thee pro-
mise—

It was a pretty promise. Would some one
Might ask the same of me !

SELLAH.

Nay ; I am sure
Thy Mother would.

HEBER.

Oh ! I have promised her
Perhaps a hundred times. I have forgotten.
Thou didst forget thy Mother's words at first.

SELLAH.

Being but a child. Yet now I join the two
For evermore. But see thy line is pulled.

HEBER.

A noble fish this time! I shall want such
To follow our great leader on to-morrow.

SELLAH.

Thou wilt not go with him through all the town?

HEBER.

Ay, to their inmost shrine, if so he leads.
Look not so pale, that I should do as thou.

SELLAH.

As I!

HEBER.

Yes, love sweet honour first of all.

SELLAH.

But honour asks not death without a cause.

HEBER.

Not without cause. I gave my faith to him—
A God-directed man. What was thy promise?
Never to will that which felt wrong. Nor I!
So help me, Heaven! Then, in that other land,
We two may meet again. Am I too bold
To speak as to old friend. We *are* old friends.

One day like this is worth a tame life's friendship ;
And I am of thy race, and thou of mine.

SELLAH.

Thy Mother ! oh, thy Mother ! think of her
Who loves thee so. It will be death indeed,
If thus in war you two invade the streets.
The King himself could not ward off thy fate.
Oh, rather let your boats drop down for ever,
Beyond the city and the gilded gates,
And all the southward gardens of the Queen ;
Down on the great broad river, ever down
To some far land, where are no sons of Seth.

HEBER.

And wilt thou come with us, if thus we go ?

SELLAH.


If it so please thy Mother, and my Lord
The King.

HEBER.

And without leave from him thou wilt not come ?

SELLAH.

He was most kind to me. I scarce could grieve him
Who yet would weep with joy to serve thy Mother.



HEBER.

And thou wouldst have me false to my great friend
Who is the servant, as I think, of God !
But, Sellah, not as servant would we take thee,
Daughter of Cain, that his last youth is proud of.
But —

MELCHAH.

Heber !

HEBER.

My Mother calls. And see ! a stranger !

SELLAH.

Push back thy boat against the shore. Oh, make
him—
Make him a friend ! It is the artist chief,
Who has more power than all—ay, than the King.

(Enter SHIRAS, SETH, and MELCHAH.)

SHIRAS.

My huntress Goddess ! Now, by our Divines,
It was a stupid fate that stirred you two,
The prettiest sight of this whole summer-time.
The light upon the rippling water, Sellah,
Is poor to that which waved upon your hair.

SETH.

You seek us, sir, you tell me, from the Queens—
My friend and me. I pray you, let us know,
Wherefore they honour us with this their mes-
sage?

SHIRAS.

I pray you, sir, just ask why light illumines—
Why water quivers thus—why fate is fate;
But ask me not the cause of woman's will!
Perchance they deem your friend here has a bright
eye—
Yourself a perilous strong arm. I know not.
I am their Majesties' most humble servant,
Who do just as I am told.

SETH.

But we are not—
Not used to bow, or deal in ways of Kings.

SHIRAS.

If you permit me, I would quite suggest
They know that fact, and therefore send for you.

SETH.

To be their sport, then. Sir, we will not go.

SHIRAS.

Just as you please ; but pray, be reasonable.
You come here to a highest festival ;
You see a statue really divine,
And with odd taste, I must say, knock us down.
If there be any reason for your acts,
'Twere well to give it. Otherwise we shall hold
You simply bullies, and as such deal with you.

SETH.

Sir, we have come in the great name of Heaven !

SHIRAS.

The very thing ! Then tell them all about it—
Our Queens—the subtlest heads I know. You would
Enlighten all of us. Begin with them ;
We rest will trust to their divinity.

HEBER.

And we have come because we like to see
The strange things of the earth, who like not well
Such balking as was tried with us this morning.

SHIRAS.

Again, most excellent ! just see our Queens !
The strangest things I know ; pray, study them !

I have been studying these many years,
And still am half at fault.

MELCHAH.

But wilt thou answer,
Sir, for their lives, if thus they go with thee ?

SHIRAS.

Nay, that I will not, Dame, nor for my own ;
I heard but now my head and tongue wagged loosely.
But I will answer that their heads are safer
If thus they come with me than if they come not.
I pray you think how powerless you are.
And they will have a marvellous strange sight—
The southward gardens all lit up, and none
To see, or be seen, save their favoured selves.
But mark ! the evening glory tinging falls
Around us as we stand. Another hour
Will bring the darkness. I am your guardian—
Your envious guardian—to the mystic gates ;
Thence you must guide yourselves.

SETH.

So be it, then !

Sir, we attend you.

SCENE II.

An Illuminated Garden.

SETH and HEBER.

SETH.

All reeks with sin.

It must be in our pristine innocence
Each beauty was of God, who is its essence—
Beauty of form, of light, of sound, of shadow—
But here they should have chorus of men's groans,
Of infant death-cries, and the wail of souls,
Since unrul'd love of sensual luxury
Has writ in blood the downfall of our race.

HEBER.

I had a feel of wickedness in much ;
Yet is the distant sight most beautiful.

SETH.

Oh, friend ! think of the human happiness
That still might make an Eden of the earth,
If men loved first the beauty of the soul.
As we stand here where our free eyes may roam,
My thought goes back to the old days again,

And two who loved as dearly as the angels.
I often dream of them as they might be,
With stalwart sons like thee, and daughters, Heber,
As good and bright as that sweet child we left,
Tilling their simple fields, and thanking God
For the fair gift of life. A beautiful thing
Is wedded love that robs no human heart.

HEBER.

And yet thou never thought'st of such.

SETH.

I loved
My father first—my father and my brothers ;
Then two dear sisters ; and now thee and thine,
That we have left. I heard my father's voice
Last night.

HEBER.

What ! in a dream ?

SETH.

No ; as I woke,
The word "beware" rang in my ears as plainly
As I hear thee. It well may be this night
Enfolds some dark temptation for us both.
For thee, perhaps, it takes this amorous guise

Of languidly-tinged light, and glimmering forms,
And perfumed shades enlacing overhead,
But my old beard were scarcely soiled by such.
I doubt our archest enemy hath still
Some deeper snare reserved.

HEBER.

I almost wondered
Hearing thy answer to the messenger.

SETH.

And yet to have refused were death or flight—
In either case our mission unfulfilled.
We are the little army of the Lord,
That He hath gathered here to do His will.

HEBER.

Yet would I fear these Queens.

SETH.

And I much fear;
But hold them as our chiefest enemies,
Who are still human, and as human dear
To God.

HEBER.

I had rather trust the King.

SETH.

For he
Hath been at least in one thing gracious. Heber,
The wisest friend I ever had was child,
And thou art wise beyond thy years. My thought
Is but to do the little good we can,
Trying each path that opens earnestly.
If all should fail, why, the poor world is wide—
At least for thee and thine ; and we have done
That which was given to do.

HEBER.

Thou wilt not leave us ?

SETH.

Never in heart —— Mark ! mark ! the light !

HEBER.

Most strangely
It grows on us !

SETH.

Like lightning flash that rests.

HEBER.

All things begin to dazzle—leaves, trunks, earth,
The spray of grasses bending through the trees,

The distant statues in their gleaming lines,
The very sand !

SETH.

In that which beams on them,
Whitest from o'er yon upward hanging mass,
As though the summit were a sun. It may be
Some wondrous elemental fire there burns,
Before whose strength the lamps have paled like
stars,
No brighter than the chalices of light
That many a stem holds brimful to the sky.

HEBER.

Mark the wee night-flies in their airy dance,
Amid the chequering bars of shade that cross
The pearly glamour of the earth's bright face—
If earth indeed, and not some strangest dream,
That we may gaze in thus.

SETH.

Most marvellous

The power that God hath given to man ! Here light,
The first of creatures, and the loveliest,
Slave to his art, can work his fancy's will,
Making enchanted palace of the wood,
That thus —— It fades !

HEBER.

Is gone as suddenly
As it arose ! Scarce can I mark thy form
Here as we stand.

SETH.

The lamps are not so bright,
Or fewer than before.

HEBER.

Surely a step !
This were the time to take us at a vantage !

SETH.

I hear it not, but youth has quicker sense ;
Give me thy hand, and draw thy sword as I.

(Enter AZRAH and LEAH.)

Now, as I live, two women-forms ! Your pleasure ?

AZRAH.

That you enjoy this night !

SETH.

Scarce more, O Queen,
If queens you be, than God's sweet silent moon
Upon the sleeping earth.

AZRAH.

Yet that you have
For ever, while our more artful brightness
Was new at least.

SETH.

And has as such amazed us.

AZRAH.

Amazed, but left no joy. I grieve at it,
Who hoped to give your strange steps happier welcome,
Giving the best we had.

SETH.

We wander not
For pleasure, Lady, else had we been pleased.

AZRAH.

Then wherefore have your steps thus sought our
land ?

SETH.

To chide and warn.

LIAH.

Oh admirable steps !

AZRAH.

Chide ! but the captive earth enriches us.
Our warriors doff their helms for lack of foe.
Hast thou some other world to conquer, or new joy
To rate us for the missing of ?

SETH.

Even that.

AZRAH.

And where ?

SETH.

In our own hearts, that, lit by truth,
Should be for each a universe of joy.

AZRAH.

As now are ours, who stand before you, queens,
A mother and her child, but girt by powers
You scarce may dream of. Why should we be chid
As darker or less glad, who make our people
The happy one of earth ?

SETH.

Because of sin—
Of deadliest cruelty to human lives,
That God hath made as thine.

AZRAH.

And who is God ?

SETH.

The Maker of us all, who loves the least.

AZRAH.

And where may He be found ?

SETH.

In living souls.

There is no human heart so utterly lost,
But it hath still its promptings to do well ;
Its warning from the ill, or thirst for good ;
The last poor fluttering impulse to be true,
Or just, or merciful, or give more joy ;
That is the voice of God !

AZRAH.

Nay, that is ours.

Why should I part thus with my better self ?

SETH.

Lady, the willing to be good is thine,
But not the good that draws thee to itself ;
And now thou willest not good ; thy pomp of place

Is based on misery, thy joy in sin,
That of its essence is eternal pain.

AZRAH.

Slave, I sin not !

SETH.

But cause the world to sin,
The deeper evil ever.

AZRAH.

What wouldst thou have ?

SETH.

Have thee a queen indeed ; thy crown a land
From evil drawn to good ; thy sceptred pride
A grateful people rendered to the Lord ;
Thy robe great charity, that covereth
With thousand thousand joys of little hearts,
That but for thee had groaned for evermore.
Then when a kindly age shall dim at last
The brightness of thine eyes, their gentle gaze
Will look out on a suppliant multitude,
All tiring Heaven for thee.

AZRAH.

A pretty dream ;

Yet scarcely that our dull minds might have hoped
for

From one who strode into our festival
Like a rough god of war. A mother feels
The scorn done to her son.

SETH.

Thy pardon, Queen !

If then I erred, as much I fear I erred,
Mistaking in old sin the call of Grace—
Wherefore my weakness with thy messenger,
Whose sleek sense well might gird the cause of truth,
As worded then by me—I pray thee, place it
To my poor natural feebleness, being man
Of many faults, not to my mission here,
That yet may prove last chance of joy eternal
For thee and thine.

AZRAH.

Most fairly spoken, sir,
And fairly to be answered. In dim temple
Within these rounds, a mystic scroll enfolds
The fortunes of our people long predicted.
I, priestess, with one witness open it,
Yet ever trembling, lest stern ill attend
The lightest flaw in all observance due.
So noble now thy theme, and thine own words,

I deem the time befits such perilous action ;
And if thy steps will so far follow mine,
The weightiest sanction may attend thy wish,
And this strange news you bring.

SETH.

For such an end

I may not shrink.

AZRAH.

Then, follow my dim guidance,
Fearing no ill

[*Exeunt* SETH and AZRAH.]

LIAH.

It seems that they have gone !

HEBER.

Nay, it is plain.

LIAH.

And left us !

HEBER.

And left us.

LIAH.

You know what they have gone for ?

HEBER.

Yes ; some book.

LIAH.

Oh, you believe the book !

HEBER.

I said not that.

LIAH.

Well answered ; but how frightened you must be !

HEBER.

And why ?

LIAH.

A lamb left with a tigress thus.

HEBER.

You look quite like a girl.

LIAH.

Looks are deceitful—

Almost as words : know you my mother's purpose ?

HEBER.

To find a prophecy.

LIAH.

Rather a soldier.

She thinks your friend would make a stalwart
one

If he choose well ; if ill, why, bones are sweet.
I am a most frank tigress—am I not ?

HEBER.

What should she want of soldier with no foe ?

LIAH.

Except my Lord the King—and he a half-friend.

HEBER.

The King !

LIAH.

Dear innocence ! each for himself
Or herself is the rule in this sad world.
The Queen loves dearly power the King has tired of,
And fears him just a little, who in rage
Would eat us both quite up. You value
My frankness at its worth—it has its lesson.

HEBER.

I mark the frankness, but am dull to teach.

LIAH.

My lamb must choose as well—if he choose badly,
Queen's secrets must be kept at every price.

HEBER.

But if he choose aright ?

LIAH.

Then my pet page
Shall wear the prettiest sword !

HEBER.

Well, for a page
Methinks you pay a very marvellous price.

LIAH.

And how ?

HEBER.

In these wide gardens lighted thus
And your own midnight steps.

LIAH.

Not for my page,
But for my whim, fair Sir. We queens must live.

HEBER.

I have not named the greater
H

LIAH.

—Price. In what?

HEBER.

In frankness. Pages have their tongues, you know.

LIAH.

But no one heeds them who are ever mocked.
And yet ere now a tigress met young lion
Just as we two stand here—a perilous chance
For teeth's sake on both sides.

HEBER.

Nay! they all roar,
Lions and tigers, far more than they tear.

LIAH.

Which has the forest ring.

But have you marked
How pleasantly our statued paths meet here?
That is the way of youth, and this of joy,
And there sweet music gives her every pose.

HEBER.

While here?

LIAH.

All join in calm philosophy,

That from this central vantage-ground surveys
The human roads, and takes the sweet from each.

HEBER.

And so we are philosophers !

LIAH.

In claws.

The world is very pleasant, Lion, with two things.

HEBER.

And they ?

LIAH.

Are youth and freedom.

HEBER.

Yet for queens

The world must slave.

LIAH.

I care not for the world,

But for the queens.

HEBER.

The queens—but *they* are free

LIAH.

Sometimes.

HEBER.

But it is rule that makes a queen.

LIAH.

Queen—not the name of queen.

Now, mark those lamps !

Might you not think them stars in earthly lines ?

How curiously the stars shine by-the-by—

To me they have a mocking quiver ever,

As if they shook with laughing at us mortals.

HEBER.

If Queens may not be free—who are the free ?

LIAH.

How can I tell ? Perchance who make them such.

I do not teach—I am but mockery,

Just like the stars ; perhaps they, too, are bound.

All things are bound, I think, except our state,

That crumbles fast to ruin with the King.

But now, young Sir, it is your turn to speak ;

Why have you sought our land ?

Nay, were I a man,

I would scorn to own a thought I dared not tell—
That is, to be a king.

HEBER.

Lady ! I came
Somewhat to see ; somewhat to help, it may be.

LIAH.

Now by my Mother's fair divinity,
Her oracle's best answer were less puzzling—
To help, and whom, or how ?

HEBER.

In part my friend,
Whose great designs you know ; in part my race.

LIAH.

Conspirator ! trust not the race at least ;
And for the rest, if I were young and strong,
I left autumnal fanatics alone.
But for conspiracies, they are in fashion.
The fabric of our state is crumbling, Lion,
And well may crush my Father, who heeds not ;
No seer might tell who comes out uppermost.
It were chance worth the trying.

HEBER.

That I know not ;
But for your counselling—my faith is given,
By it I stand.

LIAH.

Of course ! of course ! of course !
Yet look not quite so tragical ; a jest
Beseems you better. So you have come, you say,
To free our slaves, all by your single self !
Dear, dear, but this is bad. What think you now
If I should play the traitor ?—I like my slaves.
And as I mind it, it was rudely said :
Your rustic manners need improvement, Sir.
We give our little lessons in yon walls.

HEBER.

That *is* improved ; threats, like my jests, become
you.

LIAH.

Your jests become not me—pray, be precise !
But now the mystic scroll is read, what say you ?
Shall we yet further tread this labyrinth ?

HEBER.

Here I await my friend.

LIAH.

But what will you do ?
Our conversation, as it seems, has reached
Rather a flagging point. You might count the lamps,
First on this side, and afterwards on that.
Who yet it may be have more serious cause
For meditation. Fare you well !

[A pause; then enter SETH.]

SETH.

Heber,

Thy mother was the wiser. I erred much
Leading thy young steps to this devilish place.

HEBER.

Thou hast seen the scroll ?

SETH.

Aye seen, but opened not.
In a dim tomb within wide caverned halls,
Beneath yon hanging leaf-world, as I think,
It lay on table of a rugged stone,
Lit by a single lamp—a black seared stone,
Like those which fall from Heaven. Scarce could I
see
Aught but its age and shadowy pillars round,
And her pale face ; but ere she had unwound
The outermost leaf, I thought what words might be

Within its yellow folds, and laid my hand
Upon her wrist, until she answered me.
The legacy of an unearthly sage,
That in that spot had thought and dreamed and died—
It might be died, for men knew not his end,
But found this scroll when he was seen no more.
Then thought I of my kinsman, Father Enock,
Yet felt scarce words of his were in such place.
But still she spoke of weakness in the state,
How men were ripe for change, and she a power
That with this prophecy might turn their minds.
And still I feared to lose the possible good,
And feared to sin opening unhallowed words
Where superstition ever leads to death,
Till as I glanced around, I caught far off,
Other faint light amid the massive shades,
And in the bitter weakness of my doubt
Passed toward it, soon to find another temple
Almost as dim, yet bright enough to show
The hellishness of vice in shameless symbol.
Then knew I nothing good was in such death,
And so am here.

HEBER.

By yonder path we came.

SETH.

Let us go on.

Act IV.

SCENE I.

A Portico in the Palace.

SHIRAS.

SHIRAS.

All things draw to a head ;
His very guards begin to murmur at him,
And lolling girls dare jests they once had tried
As they would leap from yonder pinnacle.
The common herd loves to be used, not scorned ;
And now he scorns them in their gift of power.
The man is sick of being a god, and shows it ;
Has drained the hollowness of his divinity
To the last turn, and so will break the cup.
A fool—but grand fool for his pains.

Were I
To feast as he has feasted on all pleasure,
Pressed to his lips so fast he scarce might taste,
In love or rage no one desire ungranted,
I too might play the sage after his fashion,

And brain my wisdom in satiety.
But thanks to Fate, I work for every good,
Having a hundred schemes for each great year
Of my new life, were I the King. The King!
The word is very taking while my head
Sits on my shoulders thus! Without it—well,
Without it, and my ears—it had of course
No very special charm—as far as I know.
Yet were I king, such head were scarcely safe
On other neck; thing to be thought of now.
Moreover action should be promptest ever,
When once men stand committed as I stand.
If he will see these stranger-folk, and show
Them favour as he may, in such a mood,
Then hath our hour arrived. Already murmurs
Are loud and deep, at that new freak of his,
Guarding their rudeness with his signet ring.
Our young men are too pleasant to be saints,
And find their gods and goddesses much to their
taste.
No king may change them there.

But here he comes.

(Enter ADURAM.)

ADURAM.

A glorious morn! best seen from this I think.

How pleasantly the city shows beneath
A map of white and gold !

SHIRAS.

Scarcely a map, Sire ;
The higher roofs are all too near. I have
At home a plan that gives this very view,
Modelled in clay by a deft hand of ours.

ADURAM.

Not half of it, Shiras. What plan can give
That play of sun and shade—the light-magic
Doubling the gold and glamouring all the green,
Out-sparkling yonder on the distant stream ?
There is the god-like something you have missed
In that cold art of yours.

SHIRAS.

Sire, I have tried
Tinging my statues, and have tired of it.

ADURAM.

I do remember. You have tired most wisely.
A hundred coloured dolls set on a board
Were but poor rendering of that crowd below,
As seen here now by us. It is that sight,
Just as it reaches these our corporal eyes,

With all its parts blended in harmony,
That I would have you give us.

SHIRAS.

Not in clay—

It were impossible ; and yet I feel
The thing might be even as thou hast dreamed it.
Thou should'st have been an artist, Sire.

ADURAM.

Perhaps

A traveller. Were it not well to go on
Beyond that misty plain, for ever outward ;
For ever, and for ever ? Will you come ?
I would trust you as a fellow-traveller.
Nay, never look so pale. The world is dark now,
But were the darker if your life was out.
We should have seen strange sights ere all was done.

SHIRAS.

Scarcely as bright a one as that below, Sire.

ADURAM.

But less soiled by the thousand steps of men.
I often think if God of goodness made us,
As was the ancient tale, to be like Him,
How He must loathe the work of His own hands.

SHIRAS.

But some of us have done most excellent work.
Think of thy city, King, and of my statues !

ADURAM.

And of our chastity and faithfulness.
No, Shiras ; if the world were to be lost
But for one just, nor you nor I might save it.
Yet are there good men on the earth—and women.

SHIRAS.

What deemest thou of these strangers ?

ADURAM.

I will meet

The elder one to-night. Ha ! guard your brow !
It is an artist weakness ; nerves tell tales.
Now for that bust ; let it be sent to-morrow.
Ere night the niche must be complete, for then
We build the single passage, and the tomb
Is sealed for evermore.

SHIRAS.

It shall be ready.

ADURAM.

A 'strange word "evermore" on human lips,

Who know not what the morrow's dawn may bring.
Think you our fathers are "for evermore?"
I doubt that human thoughts can ever fade,
Being frozen still in spirit, as you freeze
Our looks in clay. Look to it, then! look to it!
Meanwhile, this portico is yours. I will see
The man at nightfall; if the news he brings
Outweigh his rashness, it is rich indeed.

[*Exit* ADURAM.]

SHIRAS.

Now, by my life I stop; the man is too noble
To slay with arrows from a roof, or sleeping;
And face to face, I might as well rush headlong
Upon the city gates. Stop! can I stop?
These cogging captains will denounce me first
To save their own necks, if they think I waver.
Once men conspire as we, some one must die.
Curse on my cleverness, who laugh at others,
Yet wound this needless net about myself.
I owe the man no grudge, but now must slay him,
Or else be slain and pilloried as traitor,
Since nothing whitens treason but success;
I who so easily had held aloof.
Traitor! yet why should I be traitor, striving
But for the self-same goal that he hath won?
I am no traitor, let the worst be worst,

Who yet would save him could I save myself.
I wonder hath he now some real thought
Of westward travel, leaving crown and Queens?
He scarce will take them with him, as I think.
The man is all too full of sap to die,
Or be resolved to die, in utter tedium;
Being far more like to tempt some dangerous
 course,
That hath at least the zest of change and action.
What if I offer to attend his steps,
And thus gain him his life and them the crown?
But nothing for myself, not even grand folly!
No, once begun, the game must be played out.
And even with the thought here comes the Queen.

(Enter AZRAH.)

AZRAH.

Well met! Hast thou yet seen the King?

SHIRAS.

But now,
He meets the large-limbed sanctity to-night.

AZRAH.

It were most dangerous.

SHIRAS.

For us thy slaves ;
Thou art above the risk.

AZRAH.

I tell thee, man,
It were most dangerous for me and thee.

SHIRAS.

For *thee*. Then must our thoughts be strained indeed !
It might be well our friend were met withal.

AZRAH.

To rouse the King,—that is ill council, Shiras ;
Better to chain him, for his good thou knowest,
While yet his fury sleeps.

SHIRAS.

It is well said ;
And in the glimmer of such wish of thine,
Myself have sounded some of our chief leaders.

AZRAH.

And they ?

SHIRAS.

Will act on written word from thee.

AZRAH.

A fearful word,—it must be written too,
No harm befall the king !

SHIRAS.

Of course no harm !
Still would I write it not ; men love not fetters
When they have staked their heads upon a throw.

AZRAH.

Meanwhile some walls must hear. It well may be
The King will closet with his messenger.
She must be met, Shiras.

SHIRAS.

Nay, she is harmless.

AZRAH.

Harmless ! the slippery viper that has crept
Into my place,—the cold malignant slave
That spits her venom calmly, smiling ever.
I tell thee, man, thou shalt not have the writing
Until that girl is in my power. Choose thy course.
[Exit AZRAH.]

SHIRAS.

Thicker and thicker, deep and deeper still.
Now must the crown be dearly gemmed indeed,
Were worth such grasp as mine !

SCENE II.

A River-bank above the City.

HEBER and SELLAH.

SELLAH.

It was so dear a sun, I grieve for it.

HEBER.

But it will come again, or suns as bright.

SELLAH.

I think no day could ever be like this
For ever.

HEBER.

To-morrow, and the morrows still.
Give me the harp !

[He sings.]

The sun hath died upon the plain—
The lustres tinge the stream no more—
Or if in dawn he comes again,
Lights now some wond'rous far-off shore.
But he hath left a dearer bliss
In this sweet silent darkening air,
A spirit-light more deep than his
Here, everywhere ;

Making the earth new earth for me,
A jocund path, a gardened way,
Leading to joy's eternity,
Whose far effulgence lends its ray
To all that Heaven can give man here,
In yearnings filled with thoughts of thine,
And feel that thou art ever near—
For ever mine.

Is that the first song made for thee, Sellah ?
It is as yesterday I told my mother
That joy was coming to us with the river.
Lo, it has come ! Give me the hand again—
My own hand now.

SELLAH.

But *thou* wert happy ever—
Thou and thy mother.

HEBER.

As thou wouldst be with her
If I were gone.

SELLAH.

Oh, Heber, jest not thus !
Too many dangers lurk about our paths
For such light words. Would that your boats once
more
Were turned streamward !

HEBER.

Homeward, Sellah, homeward !

I will school thy lips to that sweet word of home.
Yet is it saddest change, I ween, for thee,
From gilded halls to a poor lonely hut
Beside the river.

SELLAH.

O that we were gone !

I wonder, will the good man move the King ?
They must have met ere now.

HEBER.

Was it not strange
To choose that monster tomb for meeting-place ?

SELLAH.

It is the last night of the open grave
Of him whose words were often on such themes ;
Whose loss it may be speaks e'en louder now.
And yet I half think some mysterious cause
Thus draws the King to its deep solitude ;
He was more moved, when last I sought him there,
Than is his wont.

HEBER.

If his strong heart be changed,
We shall do sturdy battle for it yet.

SELLAH.

Alas ! I am so wicked, I scarce wish
For aught but that your boats move once again.

HEBER.

How bright will be the sparkle on the waves,
Laughing down welcome from our own far bank !
Methinks the prow will skim them like a leaf,
With thee beside my mother.

SELLAH.

It were hard
For thee to push alone ; could I not help ?

HEBER.

Yes, with thy words and song ; at noon we
rest.
I shall not sleep, but thou wilt sleep, of course.

SELLAH.

Nay, it is thou who toilest,—but mark yonder,
The westward glimmer fades outright ; ere long
Will be the hour when I must seek the King.

HEBER.

I wish thou wouldst not go to him to-night.

SELLAH.

It was his last request.

HEBER.

I know, I know !

He was most good to let thee come with us.

SELLAH.

Most good.

HEBER.

And yet I would he chose daylight
For these last words. How did he grant it to thee ?

SELLAH.

With gentlest speech.

HEBER.

Just said that thou mightest come ?

SELLAH.

Well, yes.

HEBER.

And said no more than that, Sellah ?

SELLAH.

Well, somewhat more.



HEBER.

What more ?

SELLAH.

I should not tell thee,
Perhaps.

HEBER.

Not me, who have a right to all
Now ?

SELLAH.

All of mine, it may be, not of his.

HEBER.

Of his ! Now, dost thou make me long indeed.

SELLAH.

There is not much to tell—

HEBER.

But much to hear—
Being all of thee.

SELLAH.

I did not say that, Sir.

HEBER.

But I divined it. No, this little hand
Is prisoner till thou tellest.

SELLAH.

He is tired
Of being a king.

HEBER.

And wedded to a queen—
I marvel not at that.

SELLAH.

He said for him
Earth must be desert everywhere, yet dreamed he
Of fuller life beyond the hum of men.

HEBER.

Life shared by thee! And thou—how answer'st thou?

SELLAH.


I answered not.

HEBER.

My own, and he?

SELLAH.

Just smiled;



A kindly smile, the first I had seen for months.
And then —.

HEBER.

Well then ?

SELLAH.

He said some words of thee.

HEBER.

Of me !

SELLAH.

Of thee, and of thy mother, Heber ;
Said youth was summer-time, and youthful truth
The sunshine of the world. He wished me well.
Then told me I should come again to-night,
When he would give me to thy friend, as father.
He has some jewels, too, that shall be mine :
“E'en in your fields,” he said “diamonds are diamonds.”
And then —.

HEBER.

Well then ?

SELLAH.

We parted.

HEBER.

What ! like that ?

SELLAH.

Not quite. It was the only time, Heber—
He kissed me on the brow.

HEBER.

Now by great Cain
I like that King of thine ; and, if he want me,
I stand by him to death !

SELLAH.

Hush, Heber, hush !
To-morrow with the dawn we start for ——.

HEBER.

Home,
Home, home ! but only if the King refuse.
I will double our wee garden for thee now,
But leave, I think, the clinging fence of vine,
That squares its earthly richness cosily.

SELLAH.

And art thou all days working in thy home ?

HEBER.

All days—not one in five, but now in two.

SELLAH.

And for the rest ?

HEBER.

I bathe, and hunt, and climb
The trees. I have three sharp points ; see, with these
I mount the highest trunks without a branch ;
Resting on two, I hammer in the third.
Straying amid thy brick-built streets, I thought
The stateliest walls should yield to these. I love them
As my own thought. I never heard of others.

SELLAH.

But thou wilt climb no more. I could not bear
To see it, Heber. Now we will till our garden,
And make green arbours for thy mother's rest.
Oh, that we were but gone ! This last dear day,
With its sweet glimmering of coming joy,
Has made a coward of poor me, that once
Was brave as thou.

HEBER.

Yet, as we now sit here,
They sat, the two, of whom they spoke to-day—

His brother, and that brave maid of our race,
Who knew the morrow brought them death.

SELLAH.

Alas!

I shudder at the thought.

HEBER.

I shudder not.
He had been wrapped to Paradise, and seen
The blessed mystery of the angel's voice,
And knew they went together to their fate.

SELLAH.

To death from those sweet shades where life had been
So dear a joy for both.

HEBER.

To fade at last.
I rather shudder at the thought of death
For those who know not love is evermore.
It was that hope of an eternal morrow
That gives earth's prize to me in this dear life,
Lived for dead friend.

SELLAH.

Whose strength thou knowest now.

O Heber, when I think of all may be,
If we but live !

HEBER.

And we shall live—
First in our woods, until we tire of them,
And of our failing eyes and numbing limbs,
And all the ills that cloud man's bodily age ;
Then in ourselves undimmed for evermore.

SELLAH.

How could we live without these lives ?

HEBER.

I know not,
Who know but little ; almost nothing, Sellah.
How can these waves for ever keep on flowing ?
Is there some mighty fall far off that draws them on,
And shall it ere be filled, and they return ?
How little do we know ; least of ourselves ;
Just feeling that we are, and that we love,
And now that we have Maker who loves us.
Is it not strangest thought, the angel's word,
That God shall die for man ?

SELLAH.

Almost too strange.

HEBER.

And yet, if God is goodness, were it not good
To sacrifice ourselves for those we love ?

SELLAH.

Most good ! and a sweet joy when we love truly.

HEBER.

And God is goodness, and pure joy ; so good,
They say, we cannot fancy half His goodness.

SELLAH.

How good thou art !

HEBER.

Good ! thou shouldst hear my mother !
And yet I *am* good sitting thus with thee,
And grateful too.

SELLAH.

And I for ever grateful.

HEBER.

Then since we know that God is still most good,
Loving us ever, as our mother's love,
And powerful beyond all human dream,
Is it not best when these vague doubts arise,

And we are tempted with the how and where
And when—if this can be or that—to feel
That He *is* God, and that we love and would serve,
And so will trust us to His hands, believing
That He hath care of us deeper than ours,
And myriad ways of making good His love,
Our farthest fancy may not glimmer of?

SELLAH.

Was it not strange to picture Him as Child,
The Maker of us all a little Infant?

HEBER.

The two were giving up all things for Him,
Their own young lives, and the sweet sounds of babes;
It may have been to teach that He is all
For all.

SELLAH.

Yet He hath made the world so bright
For us. It were most sad that all should fade,
Thy fields and hut, and that poor harp and river.

HEBER.

Perhaps they will not fade. I know the face,
Which now I scarcely see, will never fade,
But be my joy for evermore. Perchance all things,

Most bright and good, are with the good for ever ;
Therefore our bodies rise as we were told.
It may be in the happy lives to come,
All hours passed in pure joy are present to us,
For ever I may sit beside thee thus,
And hear these words of thine.

Give me the harp !

[*He sings.*]

Gliding silently at our feet,
The darksome waves go by,
Like some night-form we might meet
In a dream of another sky ;
Live thing winding on clouded plains,
Where doubt, and yearning, and emptiness reigns,
And nothing of all this earth remains
But thou and I.

Creeping, quivering, circling there,
The waters and this my song,
Both go down on the evening air,
Both will have passed ere long ;
But the river will flush with the coming morn,
Full soon in its silvery triumph borne ;
And must my poor notes die forlorn
The bank along ?

Think it not love ! in every soul
Is an ocean of thought and dream,
Now ever lying from pole to pole
In the night-star's shallow beam.

But ere it be long there will rise a day
To light the innermost depths with its ray ;
Then thou and I shall hear alway*
This song of the stream.

SELLAH.

Alas ! I like not that grim sky of thine,
Despite the pretty sounds.

HEBER.

It was but dream.
And yet were I to die to-night, Sellah,
I scarce could hope to wake in Paradise,
But rather on some dreary border-land ;
Yet happy could I see thee in thy joy.

SELLAH.

How couldst thou see me if I had no form ?

HEBER.

Could see thy thoughts, and know that thou wert
happy.

SELLAH.

I were not happy were I not with thee.

* See Note A.

HEBER.

The prison of the soul is in the soul,
So we might join, yet one be prisoner.

SELLAH.

It were no prison with thee.

HEBER.

For me, most dark one,
To feel I was unworthy at thy side.
So help me, Heaven, against that fate I strive !

SELLAH.

That thou can'st never feel. Oh, let us be
But side by side ! As I gaze on that water,
And all its unknown mysteries to come,
I think of my own far land, where, children,
We launched our little nut-lights on a river
Yet mightier than this, and watched them burn
Pregnant with fate, or so we dreamed.

See now

Thou art the taller stem ; with this, poor me !
When they are lit, the stream shall take us both
Together on its waves, to live or die.

HEBER.

They are thy very fingers, as I live ;
The little smooth smooth ends that thus I kiss.

SELLAH.

For shame ! they are ourselves, Sir, thou and I ;
And thus I lend them life, and to our fates—
Nay, take my other hand while I reach down.

HEBER.

How pleasantly the gentle light steals out
Upon the water, making dim the stars
For its wee circle ! I must hold it still ;
We well may watch our fates thus hand in hand.

SELLAH.

Thine is the stronger light, and is my joy.

HEBER.

But thine the fairer, as I think. Ah, mark !

SELLAH.

That was a perilous swerve, but still they live.

HEBER.

Henceforth two lights must ever be thy night-call
For me. When I shall hunt or fish belated,
A double light like that will draw me home ;
They might be seen along our stream for miles.
Why, what a flash was there ! River and sky

Lit to one lustrous glow ; scarce have I seen.
Such summer gleam before.

SELLAH.

Most beautiful !
And yet, methinks—ah ! our poor lights have gone !

HEBER.

To teach us, Sellah, what this earth deserves.
The summer lightning glancing through high heaven
Was our bright call.

SELLAH.

Ah, no ! no ! no ! Our dear light
Lived long before it sank ; thy mother's love
And blessing was our call. Let us go to her.
It were time I said good-night.

HEBER.

Go not as yet !
Nay, sit thee down again ! My mother's wish
Would be for me in these last moments, Sellah.
It may be as we two sit here, we never
Shall sit again. Give me thy hand once more ;
At best it is the first time we have sat thus,
And that joy ne'er can come again. My own,
Let me but promise thee, as once thou promised ;

Whate'er betide, thy Love will do his best ;
Then can that omen speak but of great joy
For him and thee.

SELLAH.

Our own wee light lived long—
Long ere it came. O Heber ! fright me not
With these dull words ! Alas, that we were gone

HEBER.

The sun is down an hour, and with the dawn
We go.

SELLAH.

O that it were come ! And, Heber, see
I take this nut to light as I return !
Perchance 'twill bring some one to meet me. Till
then
Promise no steps of thine shall near the town.

HEBER.

I go not, Love ; and yet I promise not.
As thine own hand once sought that gentle heart,
And thus brought blessing on thy life for ever,
So must we now be brave to be most happy.

SELLAH.

But if our lives to come be but the thought

Of this life past, when our poor joys are shortened,
It too is maimed.

HEBER.

O Love, I meant not that.
Our heaven is God and His eternal beauty.
But even as our bodily frames shall live
To give us joy, so sweetest thoughts of earth
May blend amid the harmonies above.

SELLAH.

But hard times past can give us joy as well,
Seen from a present ease. Must they live too ?

HEBER.

Their memory lives, since thus it is a joy.

SELLAH.

And evil done by us ?

HEBER.

No, that will fade
In the bright rapture of forgiveness given.
How wise I grow with my new teacher, Sellah !

SELLAH.

What teacher ?

HEBER.

Even our love that makes me know
An angel in myself that answers thee—
Love, and the words that we have heard this day.
But was she very hard to thee, that crone ?

SELLAH.

Ah, Heber ! then, indeed, I longed to die,
Tossing the sleepless nights with o'erwrought frame,
Often all pain from many a blow beside.
But think not of it in our own dear dawn.
Release my hand, and tell thy mother, Heber,
It was thy wish that kept me from her. Winds
Shall scarce be swifter than my feet returning ;
And watch thou for the light !

HEBER.

Nay, I go too.
I will not trust thee from me evermore.

SELLAH.

Thou must not think of it ! The guards know me,
And this light fillet marking me the King's.
For thee the streets were now most dangerous,
And I but sharer of thy risk. Farewell !
Farewell !

[*Exit SELLAH.*

HEBER.

And does she think she longs for dawn
More than I long for it?—I, who must wait here,
In the dim lingering of the counted hours,
Until her gentle light steal through yon gloom,
Brighter to me than all the stars in heaven.
Who said the stars were mockery? That keen tongue
Whose gibes still hang like poison in my ear;
Something said too of lessons in yon walls.
Now by our love, she should not walk alone.
Oh stars, deep stars, whose strange resplendent maze
Is but weak image of an Infinite Sight,
That hath its lustrous ministers in you,
Look down on her, and guard her dangerous steps!
Our lives hang by a thread; therefore I spoke
Of that great other land, whose broader hopes
Stretch as calm summer sky behind the roses
Which now may mock us with their delicate show,
Who must not stay to gather. Let it be!
These days have given my soul a wider grasp
Worthy herself; yet were it earth's dear heaven
To feel the sweet leaves nestling round our hearts
In that poor home of ours.

Again they shine,
Those softer lightnings flickering through the sky,
As when our little hopes went down. Is this
An omen too? Why, I grow weak with omens;

The safest omen is man's strength of heart ;
The flashes are but flashes now as then,
Mysterious workings of great natural laws
That were before our lives, and will be after
 them ;
Yet do I well believe that prophecy
Of flood-gates of the deep upheaved ere long ;
Sellah and I are both of Cain and—

My Mother !

(Enter MELCHAH.)

MELCHAH.

Where is our Sellah, Heber ?

HEBER.

She hath left me
To seek the King. She will return with Seth.

MELCHAH.

Aye, if she reach the King, and Seth return.
Boy, boy, thou guardest such a prize too lightly,
In this, our peril, thou shouldst be her shadow !

HEBER.

She said, and truly said I think, my presence
Were rather danger than a guard to-night ;
She wears a badge that marks her from the King.

MELCHAH.

Which were poor safety with those Queens of thine.
Thyself hath said, all things presage his ruin.
My heart is very heavy, Heber. I forbode
No good comes of this night.

HEBER.

I will follow.

The gates are open still.

MELCHAH.

But ever guarded.
And yet, at times, the boldest course is best.
We scarce can miss the mighty sepulchre,
And in a woman's presence there is safety.
I will go with thee.

Act V.

SCENE I.

The Interior of the Pyramid.

ADURAM and SETH.

ADURAM.

A strange word "evermore;"
Coupled with it the silliest pain grows terrible.
A finger-ache that hath no end outweighs
The keenest torments of a day. A joy
For evermore were worth a kingdom's price
As fools rate such; the coin is false enough.
Stranger, thy theme is no new theme to me,
Some thoughts like these floated before my childhood;
Then dreams, soon doubts, and spurned as lies at last.
But lies, if they are lies, with marvellous hold
On the great heart of man.

SETH.

If they are lies,
Why should we live?

ADURAM.

Nay, leave out why ; and deem
Thyself just atoms chance-conglomerated.
Or if that view be difficult, hold life,
Thy life, the sport of some eternal demon,
That plays with men as cat plays with a mouse.
There may be pleasure in the thing, yet I
Would scarcely worship him who made such jest
Of me. Or think again that man is formed
By a good God, ever at war with bad one,
Giving and taking on our wretched frames.
Or lastly, deem this may be true, or that,
Or the other, the one thing we can know
Being that we can know nothing—let us live !

SETH.

And yet we know our hands are made to grasp,
Our ears to hear, our eyes to see.

ADURAM.

We think so.

But, Sir, I grant these strangest thoughts of thine
Have a most marvellous fitness in themselves ;
God being in all things perfect, nay, great name
For goodness in its essence, which implies
Self-sacrifice ; and sacrifice man's pain ;
This earth is seed-time of the evermore,

Where we shall love, and feel, and hate, or suffer,
Not as we suffer now, and sleep in part,
But with a fulness beyond mortal thought.
Yet there remains the pain of beasts ; they suffer,
And have no recompense.

SETH.

We think they suffer,
As some might think trees suffer bleeding. O King !
The love of beast could scarcely be to thee,
Amid thy many-peopled gorgeous world,
What it hath been upon the silent waste
To me. My dogs were friends, one above all
That nursed my father in his age, lying
Beside his couch, ready, at sign of his,
To seek for me a-field—a staid old comrade,
Watching, with reverend mien, the gentle life,
That in my arms went out at last ;—then grieving,
As man might grieve, most patiently and long.
And to his dying day I clung to him
As friend should cling to friend ; but on that night
A beautiful presence was with me in sleep,
If with a human face or form I know not,
Being raised above myself, or so I deem,
But felt deep in my heart some words like these :—
“ I am the angel of the Lord thy God,
Who dwells with thee in love, still seeing Him

Whose Face is Heaven and infinite life.
The smallest atoms of thy earthly world
Oft tell of care as pure and deep as mine."
And so I woke, and ever hold since then,
That spirits touch us through the world of sense.

ADURAM.

Thou dost not mean all dogs are angels ?

SETH.

Rather

That all brute things are often angel-stirred.
Hast thou not marked ere now the sudden play
Of light upon the tawny mountain-side,
That sometimes makes a joy at heart deeper
Than tongue can give ? Such is my thought, who
knows

But that God lives, and man ; it may be beasts
Have their own joys, and sorrows, and desert ;
Surely their joys and sorrows, if desert,
That we can know at least.

ADURAM.

Then is the world
An angel's world, whose wills are natural laws ?

SETH.

Not so ; the natural laws are God's, as His

The steadfast rules that guide thy frame and heart ;
Yet is thy will thy will.

ADURAM.

But why should He
Who is omnipotent use lesser wills ?
If He would greet thee with a sunset scene,
Why must His angels move the clouds—not He ?

SETH.

Why must He work through other human wills
His own will for each one of us on earth ?
Our love for Him is ever highest, best,
But still a love of creature for Creator
Of infinity small for the One great.
It well may be part of eternal fitness
Such love be supplemented by that other—
The love of men for angels and for men—
Where seed of mutual benefits shall bloom
In joy eternal. Thus, who could do all
Out of His own perfection does it not,
Yet works all good in some strange double way
Beyond our human grasp. Such is our life,
As I have dreamed it through the silent years,
A lonely man, helped by old thought of words,
Wiser than mine.

ADURAM.

And when thy dog is wicked ?

SETH.

He acts his natural part as thou in sleep.
Yet are there other wills that are not good,
Keen intellects of deadliest hate, to whom
Some power is given on earth.

ADURAM.

The evil god
Of whom I spoke, at war still with the good
One.

SETH.

Not god, but slave, whose baffled ill still works
The mystery of good.

ADURAM.

Again, in double way,
Beyond our human grasp ; so too the laws
We call of Nature may be flexible
In their great Maker's hand, and yet appear
To us unchanging ; for I like such thought
Better than other wills.

Now say what hope
Is there for those who died, and knew Him not ?

SETH.

All men with reason have His words within them,
Withdrawing from the ill, and swaying to good ;
Who know Him less and sin, suffer the least,
The essence of all sin being still to turn
The heart from Him and His.

ADURAM.

I thank thee, Friend,
If slave of slave as I may call thee friend,
For all thy thoughts, but most for these. We stand
Within the tomb of one who had obeyed,
Had he but known, obeying even thus.
Once more, thou who hast lived an angel's life,
Hast thou a hope for man of blood and lust,
Whose sins are red as the dread fire thou deemest
To be sin's penalty ?

SETH.

Surely best hope,
When he, as thou, can lead the world to right.

ADURAM.

Nay, that I doubt ; yet may I strive. They say
Strange change oft comes to men in their last hours.
Let us kneel down here by my dead son's body
And pray ; pray he and I may meet again ;
For I, too, prophesy.

L

SCENE II.

A Turret-Chamber.

SELLAH.

SELLAH.

Heber, Heber !

Oh Heber, I am taken !—lost for ever !
In vain wilt thou watch for me through the night ;
Poor Sellah cannot come back—never, never,
Never again. No little light of hers
Will shine for thee along the cold dark river.
Why did I keep thy strong arm from my side,
That then had saved me from their cruel grasp ?
Alas ! my very heart is sick with terror.
They dared not seize me thus if the good King
Had not his strong arm palsied ; and with dawn
Our dear boat would have left for ever. Mother,
New Mother, that I loved so, pray for me !
Oh pray ! I am so full of dread. He said
The great God hears our prayers ; oh, Mother, pray.
It is my love that makes a coward of me,
The love of life with him. If we had gone
But yesterday, all had been well—all, all ;
And now—it is the Queen—Shiras had warned me ;
And I who never wronged her, I must die,

Perchance in torment ; nay, most surely in torment.
Yet is my worst pang that I must leave him ;
Against that pain I have no courage, Heber.
To think that thou art waiting, and I here
Like a caged dove the fowlers hold for death.
Oh that I had its wings, that from this casement
I might float out into that darksome air,
Trusting my poor life to its arms and love.
If worst come, they shalt take me ; one brave plunge
And I shall be thy spirit bride for ever,
In those far shadowy lands thou singest of,
With thee, and with my mother, and poor Adah.
One plunge—yet now I know a God has made me,
And they have said His will is still supreme ;
May I thus leave ——

A sound ! a step ! they come !

(Enter AZRAH and LIAH.)

[After a pause.

AZRAH.

Young girl, the messengers who seized thee thus
Were mine. No longer must the gods be mocked ;
Serve them or die !

SELLAH.

Then must I die, O Queen,
Who never wronged thee, striving to please ever.

Oh Lady, by the son thou bearest, hear me !
His last sigh reached my ear ;—let me but go.
Remember, as he lay, thou too must lie.
Let me but go, and never see me more !

AZRAH.

That were poor worship—one slave lost for ever.
No such desert the gods have at our hands ;
Moreover, ill example to thy tribe.
Thou canst not move my purpose, girl !

SELLAH.

Alas !

I would not have thy dreams through the long nights,
If now thou murderest me who nursed thy son.

LIAH.

Nay, but my mother's arm were short indeed,
If she could never punish slaves who have served her.
The oxen draw our cars, yet die at last.

SELLAH.

I plead, who am a woman like herself ;
Yet even dogs who tend us have their lives.

LIAH.

But all thy tribe serve ; thou wilt be but as they.

SELLAH.

It is to her I speak, who once was mother.
Oh were thy son but here to plead for me
As I have heard him plead ere now for others!
Let me but go! the world is very wide,
And I will ask but for one little spot,
Far from thy power and all my tribe, where life
May glide away in harmlessness for ever.

AZRAH.

Some words like these I have heard my husband
 speak—
Well, well—a pretty dream; but thou must serve
Our gods!—*must, must*—that word suits thee and me.

LIAH.

It is to her you spoke who once was mother;
No doubt, no doubt, and *wife* too, as I think.

AZRAH.

My messengers attend—thou wilt go with them;
It is in vain to struggle in the net,
And on kind service there waits kinder treatment.

SELLAH.

Shame! shame! profane not my poor ears, where words
That angels might have spoken linger yet.

Go, order up your torturers ! my soul
Can laugh at all their power in the great joy
That God hath let me know His best on earth.
As for thy loathsome priests, let them repent !
I wish them no worse fate—or thee.

AZRAH.

Slave ! slave !

It is most well for thee a queenly heart
Beats in my breast, else were thy tortured frame
Something to make all women shudder at.
Thyself have seen such fates ; but I am queen
And mother, and no needless torment waits thee.
Yet must the gods be served, or thou must die.
Take half an hour to choose ; then we return.

LIAH.

Stay ! I have yet another thought, Mother.
The girl may have her fancies about gods,
And think herself a martyr for her pains,
When we but seek to teach that slaves are slaves.
Rather now grant her liberty and life—
Yet upon terms that bear their warning with
 them ;
These girls of Cain value their faces dearly.
Beside, it is their beauty the gods love—
That be the sacrifice, and let her live !

AZRAH.

Thy meaning ?

LEAH.

I have now about me, see !

A phial, in whose crystal grasp keen force
Of ruin lurks sans colour. Let her pour this
Upon her smooth white brow with her own hand,
And save her life, yet be a mark for ever
Of how Queens punish for their deities !
Remember, no God asks your life, my dear,
Only your handsome face—mere vanity ;
It's scorn will be more innocent by far
When grinned from seamed ugliness. Farewell !
Yourself must choose ; take the half hour by all
means.

Yes, Mother ! I have spoken well ; her choice
Is keenly interesting ; other reasons
I will impart without more fully—come !

[*Exeunt* AZRAH and LEAH.]

SELLAH.

The door has closed, and I can breathe again ;
Just one half hour of life,—one half hour more,
Unless I choose the living death. Shame, shame,
To give me such a choice ! More cruel, far,
Than was her mother's sharp release. Oh ! Heber,

What must I do ? I have my dagger here.
Old friend, keen friend ! Here, too, my poor child's nut,
That may make corpse-light for me now, Heber ;
Yet in the casement will I fix it thus.
He said it should be night-call for him ever.
Poor little feeble light, like my own life !
It made the stars dim on the water, here
It may no more tempt their serenity
With earthly happiness too bright to last,
But begs for mercy—mercy. O my God !
Great infinite God, whom now I know at last,
Canst Thou not save me from their wicked wills ?
But will He save Himself ? He, too, will die !
Such was their word. Alas ! I have no hope !

How harmless looks this thing ! like her, its giver ;
Yet every limpid drop hath pain within it
More searching in its grasp than the red fire
That I have seen lick quivering human forms.
Oh shame on human cruelty ! To die,
Or be a living death—such is my choice !
If now I die, I never see him more ;
Perchance may risk the anger of our God,
Who hath not sent His call in death or sin.
What did she say of martyr ? I am none,
If I choose death to horror in my flesh ;
And I might wear a veil and be his servant,

See him at morn and eve, and hear his voice.
It might not be—he is too generous—
Would cling to me the more for all my ruin.
Scarce might I mark the shudder in his kiss.
What were ten fires to that ?

No, God is good,
It were not human to inflict such pain
With one's own hand. What He sends I will bear.
Meanwhile, thou venom'd safety, break thou thus !

[A pause.]

Alas ! what have I done ? crushed my last chance.
Now I must die—die, never see him more
On earth again. Surely I might have striven,
Refused his goodness, been his friend for ever—
His valued friend, guarding his children's lives ;
But now —— Well, now my memory will live
Pure and unspotted in his heart for ever.
Yes, I have chosen well. Strange words of cheer
Seem rising half-unbidden to my lips.
Come, Queens, and do your worst ! I am his own—
His own for ever ! Let your headsman come !
And thou great Being who yet shall die for man,
But die by others' hands, oh take me now,
And keep me for him ! Keep me all unstained.
Thine are the gifts, whatever gifts are mine.
I will not throw, not one of them away
That he hath loved, or might love evermore—

That he ——

What a strange sound ! surely but spirits
Could lurk there in the darkness—spirits ! alas,
Then need I fear them not, who soon am spirit.
Again, and nearer yet, close to the casement—
Can this be new unearthly form of death
Sent by the Queens to slay me—fiery stream
Of noxious vapours stifling through the chamber.
Fool, fool, to tremble thus, who have—

Oh, heaven !

(Enter HEBER.)

HEBER.

Here ! here !—here, in my arms—my own for ever !
Thy dear call brought me—so lie there—lie there !
Yes, it is I—thy Heber ; fear not. I told thee
Their straightest walls must yield to me and love.
My mother seeks the King—all will be well.
Yes, yes ; I have my sword, and at that door-way
For thee would hold a world at bay to-night.
Nay, faint not, dearest—faint not—speak to me !

SELLAH.

I am too happy—let me lie—let me—
But, Heber, at my side is my own dagger.
If need be use it thou—my life is thine.
My own ! my own ! death would be sweet from thee !

Oh, I have suffered so—let them not take me
Alive again !

HEBER.

Nor dead. Is not thy foot
The fleetest of them all ?—and ten men's force
Is in each limb of mine. Now rouse thee, child !
Get back thy strength, and we will laugh at them.
There, that is brave ! So, lean against the casement,
And breathe the sweet night air that brought me to
thee.
Thy little light will now be doubly dear
By our own river. See, it fades at last !

SELLAH.

Alas ! why does it fade ?

HEBER.

That it has called me,
And left us here with God and His own stars.

SCENE III.

Outside the City Gate.

MELCHAH.

MELCHAH.

I cannot go ;

It were too terrible to wait alone,
And my strength equals hers.

No shout, no sound,
The last came from the light, or so I thought ;
But all things reel on this most fearful night.
It may have been out there I saw it first,
Ere yet he sent me for their rescue ;—me
Whom they must force out thus, losing dear moments.
Yet, but for it, perchance they had not gained
Shields from the frightened guards who followed not.
Why did they follow not ?—follow their King ?
A King—a lion in his scornful rage,
And gathered strength huge as our leader's own.
I think the two were well match for a city.
Surely a cry ! and hark, a trumpet-call !
The guards will muster now ; are they the king's ?
Again !—again !—the hive is up at last.
O Heber, hast thou reached her ? is she safe ?
Or must this night wed both in your young blood ?

Her, to whom I had given my trust for ever,
And felt but doubled joy in her and thee.
Again the trumpets, will they stand to their king?
Or must the three outface a world in arms?
Oh, that I too was there, if but to cheer her,
And bless my Heber as he fought for us!
Silent once more, save where the severed wave
Breaks on yon darksome buttress sullenly—
The deep dull guardian of the city's strength,
Here welling gloomily beneath my feet,
Making heart sink with its dank smell of ruin.
I wonder must we die to-night? I know
He that hath watched us through the silent years
Will send us both together to that land
Where all is changed but God, and love, and souls,
If my son falls. Strange how old memory
Of wild dark face that all girls loved but I
Comes back to-night, yet with keen pleading in it—
Keen wistful pleading it had not on earth!
If aught that I can do may solace him,
The Father of my boy, from his dim wandering
Through all the yearnings of the endless years,
I give my life for him to-night. It may be
Lives given thus in their supremest hour,
Have some strange virtue in them with God's will;
And so we two may meet in love at last,
Where wrong is not, and sin is purged for ever.

Again the clamours rise—trumpet on trumpet—
And that dull sound—the far-off rush of men.
Shouts too, and clash, as bronze would clash on
bronze.

They have burst out, and fight into the street.
Heaven help them now, and give them friends—the
three!

More loud, and breaking this way, as I think.
How they must guard poor Sellah in their midst!
That should be Heber's share—while the huge fronts
Of the two giants tower on either side,
Wielding their brassy shields like fans, their swords
As the swift gleaming of the forked fires,
Whose every leap is death. I never saw
A brow so terrible as the stern King's,
When first I gave my message to the two;
And without word he strode out in his vengeance—
In vengeance more than mercy, as I think—
Who there it may be wrong him, for our Sellah
Might well be loved even by him. Child, child!
My graceful, gentle child, that thou wert safe!
Surely the sounds are nearer even now.
If they can gain the gate with unhurt limbs
Hope will give wings along the darksome river.
Fiercer and fiercer yet. Our leader's face,
Was calm as ever as he followed him;
Or only broken with a struggling joy,

Its graver sense repelled, a warrior
In heart to-day, as when his strength flung back
A hundred once, for Heber's life and mine.
He saved it then ; oh ! may he save it now !
Since him, the fierce wild ruin of my youth,
Earth hath not seen such men.

Now the air rings
As though some street were turned !—nearer and
nearer.

Alas, that cry ! Sure there some life went out ;
Was it my boy's ? No ; Heber would not cry ;
A thousand deaths could force no shriek from him.
His father's blood too truly—till to-night
I never loved to think it *was* his father's.
To-night I have forgiven—is this death ?
They say we change in death,—cry upon cry,
And nearer yet,—they force their way—Alas !
He had no shield ; yet may he well have picked one
From off the blooded street—my boy ! my boy !
I can endure no more, but come to thee—
Thy mother comes.

SCENE IV.

The Interior of the Pyramid.

(Enter ADURAM and SETH.)

ADURAM.

Lie there, good guard !
A thousand deaths have broke on thee to-night :
Think'st thou the women will escape ?

SETH.

Fear not !
They have forgotten them, and we held good
The gate an hour at least.

ADURAM.

Should have held still—
Yet was the charge most tempting, and this rest.
The boy was hard to guide.

SETH.

Thank God he yielded !
But for the silent pleading of that face
Our words were vain enough.

ADURAM.

Yes, he will grieve ;
But hath his comfort with him. A fine boy.
Some look like his has crossed my path ere now—
But how the dull earth reddens where thou standest !
How many points have reached thee ?

SETH.

I know not ;
Knowing none worth the smart.

ADURAM.

There practice tells ;
Just three touched me. But friend—good friend !
these hours
Were worth a life to buy. Yet were there some
Foremost in hate who should be friends to-night.
Thy broad hand fills the gap. How the rogues bent !

SETH.

It was a very hail beside the gate.

ADURAM.

The drawbridge left no cover, else had we stood
Without on either side. I deem their boldest
Had scarcely tried the rush. Here we can rest ;
But prisoners in a tomb—our tomb it may be.

M

SETH.

Above us now there towers the gilded mass.

ADURAM.

The central line would fall just on this slab.

SETH.

Long weeks ago, I saw it in the clouds.
O King, we scarce leave this again !

ADURAM.

Then death
Is welcome at thy side. I did my best
To save some lives to-night.

SETH.

To thine own losing.
This night will make thee dear to those above
Who love a generous heart.

ADURAM.

Cease, cease, O friend !
That thought is redder than thy reddest wounds,
Waking up hideous light of lurid hours
Might well make me despair. It was strange vision
Thy brother saw of old.—Ha ! that was close !
See where the arrow flattened on the wall !

SETH.

Most strange and beautiful. He saw the Babe
From whose sweet eyes look myriad fathers' love ;
With her His mother and His joy on earth.
Death is not much to those who see such things.

ADURAM.

Who have been pure, as thou hast ever been ;
For lives like mine these thoughts are beautiful ;
But with an awful beauty most of fear.
The turbid stream that billows in the sun
Scarce hath the brighter depths for the sun's gladness.
Yet might the feel of Goodness infinite,
Self-sacrifice and love, having all power,
Be magic wand, transforming us poor men
From aimless wanderers to true sons of God.
Ha ! other shaft ! A short and sharp reply
Of other school to our philosophy.
A stronger school by far—it rules the world.

SETH.

To the world's ruin. Were thy city, King,
Like thee converted, what wide joy there were
In earth and heaven !

ADURAM.

Didst thou preach to them

With anything beside thy sword?—Forgive me!
I scarcely meant the sneer; yet rate not dearly
Thus with their stings in me and thee, the buzz
Without. They all have souls, thou thinkest?

SETH.

O King,
Despise no human being—for the least
Our God would die, for least will live for ever.

ADURAM.

Thou deemest so. It is strange word 'for ever,'
And strange, perhaps, to me that the poor wretch
That shivers at my gate shall live for ever.
But not to *him*—*he* thinks it natural.
And so thou holdest all should be converted.

SETH.

For one—one soul—I would give my life freely,
As should all godly men.

ADURAM.

For a single one!
Then surely I, who have such deeds to wash out,
May well risk mine for all. Give me my shield!
Men did boast, I remember, long ago
A power of word in me could move their hearts—

If then they lied not, must be tried to-night.
I will go out and speak to these hot sirs—
If they will listen—well—if rather use
Their pointed arguments—why, death is death;
Nay, I will leave my shield, and go in peace.
How often have they shouted till the sky
Shook with the roar when I have spoken for evil!
Give me thy hand—stout hand grasped all too late.
Be sure thou comest not forth, it would enrage them.
If I should fall, make for the gate ere dawn;
To bide the light were certain death. I go.

[*Exit* ADURAM.]

SETH.

Why should I stay him, who is thus a King
Indeed? Even for life it is our chance.
His massive form must show against the light,
Thus striding outward. Shall I smother it!
I dare not, being the tomb-light of his son,
And he will soon be plain enough to all.
Ha! they have seen him with that sudden silence—
Is it in wonder that they pause? He speaks.
Still not an arrow. They will listen to him.
God grant he turns their hearts and saves the world!
It is a wond'rous thing to be a king!
That was some word of battles, as I think—
Old battles where he conquered at their head.

It is God's battle that he fights to-night.
There went an arrow—they will murder him.
Yet is his voice unchanged. Another—again!
Now can I stand no more.

[After a pause.]

(Re-enter SETH and ADURAM.)

ADURAM.

The last went deep.
So, let me lean against the tomb. Yes, that
Shrewd proposition fairly takes my life.
I have had hundred wounds, but none like this.
The sickening at my heart tells tales. Good
friend!
It soon will be thy turn, and thou wilt have
none
To guard thy slumbering as thou wilt mine.
Yes, I must stretch me—so. I never knew
There was such weight about the upper man.
Thus with my back against the stone—the cowards!
E'en now, they dare not risk the rush within;
Here thou art safe enough. I had half thought
Of leaving secret passage to this cell,
But changed my mind, and changing lost thy life.

SETH.

Think not of that. Think of thyself—thy soul!

ADURAM.

Why, I have done my best for it, and now
Just leave it in God's hands. I fear no more—
Have scarcely life enough to fear, I think.
Would I had known thee sooner—in my youth !
It is a glorious time that time of youth ;
And given to virtue and to joy might make
A heaven of earth—that I had known thee
then !

Though thou wert not as I, watching the stars,
And diving into caves for hidden secrets—
In love with Nature and one other. Well, well,
Nature was true at least—no star came down—
But death is death, and I was false enough,
Heaven knows ! Yet are they glorious days of
youth.

She was the fairest woman seen on earth.
The very flowers grew sad in her sweet shadow.
I made a poem on it ;—how I knew
My love by sadness as she went—like the flowers.
She kept it many a day ; nay, has it now,
For all I know. Now while she—babble ! babble !
The loss of blood makes a new child of me.
I tell thee, friend, men yet shall live who know
More secrets in the stars than we may guess
of.

Yet may we too have found them long ere that—

My son ! I had forgot my son ! Death is most welcome.

Thou sayest he—hark, hark ! look to the passage ;
There is a step—quick ! take thy shield !

(Enter AZRAH.)

SETH.

The Queen !

AZRAH.

The wife ! the wife ! she that has murdered him—
I saw the arrow, and I could not save.
The cowards !—My own !—it was my broken love
That made me mad, that thou shouldst love another.
O Aduram, forgive !—here will I kneel,
Till death takes both thus ——

ADURAM.

Death ! talk not of death !
Lo, I am strong again ! Friend, reach me my sword !
Now thou shall see me fight—man for his wife !
Strong—strong—and yet —— and so thou lovest me !
Then let them do their worst to thee and me !
Friend, friend, the room reels round ; I am *not* strong.
It is thou must guard the Queen.

AZRAH.

Think not of that !

So, lean thy head upon me—all is over—
I tried to save thee, but they pile up faggots—
Ere long ——

SETH.

Faggots! great Heaven! O friend, now rush
And take her with thee—it is her one chance—
Quick! quick! I tell thee, quick!

SETH.

It is too late.

See where the vapour circles overhead—
And neither she nor I will leave thee, King.

ADURAM.

But she is young and beautiful, and queen.
She must not die.

AZRAH.

Just a poor murderess,
Whose one last joy is thus to die with thee,
Resting thy head upon his shoulder.

ADURAM.

Speak—

Speak to her, friend! She dies for love—true love
Of wife for husband. Speak to her of Heaven!

It may be in long years we too may get there.
Something is in my throat—I cannot speak—
And thine are holier words.

AZRAH.

Nay, he has spoken—
When I was traitress, but the thoughts were God's—
I too will hope in Him.

SETH.

Who yet shall die
In pallid agony against the night
For her and all of us. He bears our sins.
When we but turn as she has turned to thee,
Who is His love for her, in being her husband.
But even now the vapours fill our lungs
With draughts of death. I see the mighty river
Slow flowing down for ever to the light,
That is as sheen of hundred hundred suns ——
We come ! we come !

ADURAM.

He too has sank.

AZRAH.

Give me

Thy hand !

HEBER.

'The fountains of the great deep were broken up.'

GENESIS, chap. vii. verse 11.

PERSONS.

<i>Of the Tribe of Cain,</i>	{	HEBER,	<i>Man.</i>
		SELLAE,	<i>Women.</i>
		THERSAH,	
		ELLEH,	
<i>Of the Tribe of Seth,</i>	{	HUB,	<i>Men.</i>
		JOEL,	

ARDIAL.

Act I.

SCENE I.

A Grotto in a Hill-side.

THERSAH and ELLEH.

THERSAH.

Why must we seek the tomb ?
Her spirit dwells not with her dust, and God
Can hear us everywhere.

ELLEH.

And knows the best
For each, yet wills that each should ask of Him ;
I ever ask that old times may come back.

THERSAH.

Not that the dead may live again ?

ELLEH.

On earth !—No :
Such prayer was never granted as I think.

THERSAH.

But if God can do all things, He could make
Her live.

ELLEH.

But will not, since we love on earth
By faith ; and if the dead once rose again,
Faith were no more for us who could not doubt.

THERSAH.

Not for a year or two. But now they rise not,
And so ——*

ELLEH.

Hush ! thy wild words make the vines rebel.
See how thy side is rude and orderless
Until it kisses mine.

THERSAH.

Then sets thy tameness off
With blending of a ruder strength. How sweetly
The edging sunshine plays upon them both,
Fringing the plain and hill with silvered green.

ELLEH.

As seen through giant window purple-looped,

* See Note B.

Our vines the curtain. Thine was happy thought
That chose this noontide rest.

THERSAH.

But that far happier
That strewed it thus with grace of fragrant moss.
Pray, raise thine arms—I mark one spray still restive;
And thou art central figure of a dream.

ELLEH.

Impertinent! must no one rest but thou!
And now methinks the clusters stand out boldly,
Yet is there no leaf missed. From this rough seat
I have the wider view.

THERSAH.

But mine most fair,
Taking in sitting sister as the frame
Of thy bright window with its sunny joy.
Yet is it hard to think that we must face
That cloudless glitter for the far-off tomb.

ELLEH.

God who has given us all asks for so little.

THERSAH.

Nay, no one asks; my mother bids.

ELLEH.

And father ;
And through their voices speaks the Lord Himself.
If we might lie upon the moss all day,
How could we serve, or serving not, be crowned ?

THERSAH.

Tut, we might pray ! how can we help the Lord ?

ELLEH.

By helping all the good within ourselves,
Obedience, patience, courage, sacrifice.

THERSAH.

Such stupid things ! Give me this drowsy beauty !
Alas ! could we but rest here thus till night.

ELLEH.

Nay, rest is only sweet when fairly won.
Thus with this pebble's sheen I mark the light,
When yon bright line shall reach that little stone,
Thy laziness must face the plain. The tomb
Hath shade for us again.

THERSAH.

Long ere we reach it,
Joy will be gone out of the world in pain
And daze. Why must we hurt ourselves to pray ?

ELLEH.

How can we prove our service but by pain ?
Yet is such pain the truest joy indeed,
In earned appetite for passing good,
And hope of wider bliss beyond life's bourne.

THERSAH.

And yet our father is so sad, and mother.

ELLEH.

Then being sad, we both should doubly strive
To give them joy, who now alone are left.

THERSAH.

But since the world began mothers have died.

ELLEH.

And sons and daughters grieve. Yet do I deem
It is her words they miss most—whispered comfort
That we might never share.

THERSAH.

Comfort for what ?

ELLEH.

Perchance for awful truth that we must die.

THERSAH.

Well, that were secret wide enough at least.
But, is it awful? Our poor brother died
As peacefully upon my mother's breast
As I would sleep. If life must be for ever,
Long walks in thirst and glare, and painful strife,
With all the sweet that purples to our lips,
I had as lief faint here upon thy moss,
And make an end at once.

ELLEH.

Oh, jest not thus!
What were the earth to me if thou wert gone?

THERSAH.

'Obedience, patience, courage, sacrifice,'
With no wild sister to be ruled—nay, frown
not
Thy sainted frown, though well its dear old horror
Fits summer brow that marks thee stolen to Cain.

ELLEH.

The stone will soon be reached, then this must
cease.

THERSAH.

If I obey; and ever I obey.

ELLEH.

My right is strength ; but see, the sun is gone !

THERSAH.

Clouds must be gathering behind the hill ;
In very truth most welcome, though of late
Rain has been deluges that rack and tear.

ELLEH.

At least no herald thunder smote our ears
As when —— Sister, I never saw our father
So moved as on that dreadful night !

THERSAH.

I marked it,

Who mark not much—he, king of men, that
once
Unchallenged walked the city of the plain.
Since that night too, and the still frequent rains,
The over-crested river threatens its bank.
I marked this morn the brimming foam sweep
by.

ELLEH.

Its headlong rush may well amaze far down
The gilded palaces that strain the waters.

THERSAH.

—And bridge. Thinkest thou there are, in truth,
none just
Of all those southern lands ?

ELLEH.

A fearful thought !
Almost too fearful to be lightly spoken,
That God who made hath not one servant there.

THERSAH.

But if it is so hard thus to be good,
Why did He make us ? Surely He must have
known.

ELLEH.

It is not hard—it is the easier joy ;
And first it was scarce possible to sin.

THERSAH.

But God knows all ; He must have known the
end.

ELLEH.

Which we know not. It may be those who die,
Or seem to die, in sin, begin anew
A purer life in suffering.

THERSAH.

Then indeed
Is our death fearful,

ELLEH.

—Thersah! stand with me!
Beyond the tomb, upon the lowest slope,
Something is moving.

THERSAH.

Belike a deer, If worse,
Thy foot is fleet as mine, and from this vantage
Could laugh all chase to scorn. I see it not.

ELLEH.

Line by the tallest cyprus of the tomb—
Above it—fingers to the right.

THERSAH.

I mark them—
Two things—see now they are apart!

ELLEH.

Two men.
Oh let us fly

THERSAH

Thou silly one :—why, here
We are invisible as air—fear not !
But wherefore come they to our solitude ?

ELLEH

They near us fast—Oh Thersah, let us fly :

THERSAH

I make them facing for the wooded dell
Upon our hut and river.

ELLEH

Then let us warn
Our father :

THERSAH

Who is ever armed ; alone
A match for twenty of the best. Child ! child !
I tell thee we are safe. Make peep-hole thus
Amid thy vines. Now we are trees that see.
Bidah, my rogue, keep thou behind me here !
Our mother had a story of a maid
That once beguiled rude wooer in this wise.
For my part I would scorn to fly.

ELLEH.

Yet flight

Obeying well, is often truest courage.

THERSAH.

Be shame on thee, for thrush-egg stolen away
To eagle's nest, and no true child of Cain !
I feel within me that should make men bow.
Now mark them in the sun !—both tall and
 young—
Or one most young ; the other like my father,
Of manliest years mature. Why do they come ?

ELLEH.

Seeking the river from the further west,
As thou hast said. Our cottage marks the pass.

THERSAH.

When they are hid below, we will steal out,
And by the goat-path wind over the hill,
Reaching my father and the hut before them.
Why, what a child thou art to tremble thus !
Now I have lost them in the trees.

ELLEH.

There ! there !

Oh Thersah, they have turned.

THERSAH.

They stand and parley.
And see ! choose rest beneath the thanked shade ;
They know not that the river is so near.

ELLEH.

And now divest them of their heavy arms ;
They should have travelled far. How often thus
We pause too soon, when all the good we seek
Is almost gained !

THERSAH.

That is much better, dear !
I like to hear moralities again.
Who knows but we may find some poor souls yet
That thou canst edify as well as mine.
Nay, pinch me not, but come. Now is our time.
Come, Bidah !—

SCENE II.

Trees.

HUR and JOEL.

JOEL.

But that his hand upheld me,
I never reached the bank.

HUR.

Nay ; had I left
Our arms to the tide, I could have helped thee.

JOEL.

Helped me too late.

HUR.

'T was strange how suddenly
He came !

JOEL.

I thought him herdsman of the plain,
And would have asked, but dared not.

HUR.

Never before

Have I met man upon these wilds ;—yet never
Have struck the streams so far to north. He seemed
As one whose mildness was a strength.

JOEL.

For me,
Who lived through him alone, he was all strength.

HUR.

Nay, I had saved thee if the worst was worst.
I heard thy cry just as I saw him plunge,
And marked his ease of stroke. 'Tis weak of thee
To be so poor a swimmer.

JOEL.

I *am* weak.

HUR.

There may be deeper meaning in thy words
Than mine should have provoked. If thou art sorry,
Return !

JOEL.

To be more sorry, if thou wilt not.

HUR.

That struggle with the waters damped thy heart ;

I envied thee thy lightsome song before,
And laugh and word of all the pleasant faces
That thou shalt see again.

JOEL.

I said I am weak—
Yet not for pleasant faces am I with thee.

HUR.

I know it, brother, well, as is thy right.
On all the earth we two are truest friends;
And yet but that I marked our father's dotage
Now passing bound, and drivelling into ruin
Of him and his, I had not let thee come—
'Tis time that endless hammering should cease.

JOEL.

Of late our task has been to trap the beasts

HUR.

—And feed them. Yet in his most monstrous boat
He scarce lays store. What surer proof of madness?
ness?

JOEL.

He holds the Lord who sends the rain can send
Air that will feed them at His will.

HUR.

Most true—

And save the brutes without my father's care.

Why, see there how inconsequent he is—

Leave all to miracle or none !

JOEL.

He says that God

In truth works all, yet wills that we should
strive ;

And he has striven to his best

HUR.

Till now.

The planks first laid begin to rot—I marked
them.

His madness is a curse upon us all.

The substance hath been melted—not a servant

Will dwell within his tents, and soon no son.

But mark ! the clouds are lowering down the trees—

Rest where thou art, and I will gather wood ;

It well may be we need a fire ere morning.

JOEL.

Nay, go not yet, and I will join my axe,

Who hope yon gloom hath not such store as late

Seamed the deluged earth.

HUR.

A fearful night
In tent. Our stones laughed at its blustering.

JOEL.

Methought the mighty sky lifted the ocean,
And dropped its ruin on our doomèd heads;
The ever-lambent fires clung to the trees
As I have seen flames flicker on a tent-pole.
Scarce could we hear our father's voice, who, pale
And haggard, with his hoary locks out-flowing,
Ordered our strength.

HUR.

Losing two impious tigers
Who would not be the parents of their race.
That night tore all shroud from his naked madness,
Who, were he prophet, must have known the dawn.

JOEL.

Nay, he half-doubted, sharing then his doubt,
And after grieved that he had rashly acted
Unbidden of the Lord. I tell thee, brother,
The ark had its own comfort on that night,

HUR.

Joel, if courage fail thee, still return !

Alone I can face life. Whatever chance
 Our hearts are knit; and we shall meet again—
 If Jeschah grant the time.

JOEL.

Jeschah! thy meaning?

HUR.

None, boy!—words—mark those bright things, red,
 white, blue,
 Or things that were bright in the sun but now!
 They have their mysteries for thee and me—
 They and their kind—but not for all of us.
 Did I choose life at any price, my choice
 Had just one road.

JOEL.

And that?

HUR.

 Almost too dark
 To fright thy youth with. Yet have there been
 men
 Who bore such women muffled in a sack,
 And left them where no helping hand might
 raise
 The bubbling burthen from its ghastly bed.

JOEL.

It was for *her* thou didst leave thy father's tents !

HUR.

Accursed ! Such is for ever their beginning.
Remember, human ear hath not heard this,
Save thine. There is no male about our house
But thinks she loves him secretly, who loves
Herself and mischief, and no more.

JOEL.

And thou ?

HUR.

Am man enough to slay no woman. Come, boy !
These bright eyes fool the best of us, as thou
Wilt find some day—thy axe, and come !

JOEL.

Nay, sit !

I thought thy home was happy till these days,
And never guessed at this. Now will I stand
By thee for ever, who still stood by me,
When Cham and Arleth with their cruel strength—
May God forgive an ill word of the dead !—
Would play upon my childish years. Oh Hur,
Return with me and ask our father's pardon !

HUR.

And Cham's—without that it were useless—to hear
His wife lament o'er Jeschah's perfidy.
My boy, the world is wide—I find a corner
While life is mine that rescues me from that.
Better by far the serpent juice that glides
Through some such pretty veins as nod around,
By loving hands distilled to give us peace—
Peace—peace—Come, boy, that axe, and let us work!
This talking makes a woman of me ever,
Who talk to none but thee.

JOEL.

The trunk behind us
Severed will serve our end.

HUR.

Then is thy skill
Beyond mine with the axe.

JOEL.

Since I could lift one
It hath been fellow to my hand. For years
Thine hath forgotten it, in sword and bow.

HUR.

—And plough. I often guide the steers myself.

There is no life so happy as of man
That turns the earth, and armèd holds his own,
Whom, when his toil is done, a loving face
Greets in the evening porch.

JOEL.

And yet methinks
I rather lay under a tree and read,
And thought of that I read.

HUR.

As Japheth lies,
And grow such moon-struck dreamer in the end.

JOEL.

Nay, he hath brighter cause than worded dream.
Thinkest thou that angels truly come on earth?

HUR.

How should I know, who am no dreamer, boy?
Nor now, nor ever. Earthly things are fair.
If others fairer, why; I see them not.

JOEL.

Nor thoughts in symbol'd scroll who may not read,
Yet are they there; but I would speak of forms
Of more than human lustre—are there such?

HUR.

I never saw one, nor the man that lied not
Who saw.

JOEL.

If angels have indeed such form,
Heaven must be place like city of the plain.

HUR.

Then, by our father's beard, if like that last
Its citizens are by all honest men
Devoutly to be shunned. That shield of mine
Could tell its tales.

JOEL.

Nay, there is other city
That hath its spirits.

HUR.

Hark to the thunder !
This bids to be just such another night
As loosed thy tigers.

JOEL.

Now, may Heaven forfend :
If such, indeed our utmost toil is vain ;
For fire could never live amid its floods.
Is this our choicest spot ?

HUR.

That I can see.
The leaning trunk, with its huge upward show,
Out-sheltered tent by far.

JOEL.

How dark it grows,
That yet wants hour—surely an hour—of night !

HUR.

Not so—our meal beguiled the time. The noon
Was waning ere we reached these trees. A flash !

JOEL.

On either side there is a hill at worst.

HUR.

Still dreaming of thy deluges. Why, man,
There has been rain before this moon of rain,
And thunder too.

JOEL.

Again a flash ! a bright one !

HUR.

We soon shall have a good blaze of our own
To hold its ground against these glimmerings—

An honest, cheery blaze, with heat in it.
They are strange things, my boy, that heat and
light.

JOEL.

But thunder strangest with its deathly gleams.

HUR.

If scrolls could tell of these, I learned their art.

JOEL.

Yet now thou knowest fire will heat and cheer,
The how and why would add no fagot more ;
But if the Lord hath truly warned my father,
We walk self-blinded to a precipice.

HUR.

Aye, *if*—but now I know he has not, boy.

JOEL.

Being darkened, as it may be, by thy sin—
Thou knowest I would not hurt thee, so I speak.

HUR.

And shrewdly to thy purpose. Dream—all dream !
That *was* a roar !

JOEL.

Why, it is night already ;
And darkest night.

HUR.

Or so it seems to us,
Whose little sun begins to make its day
Around us here, giving the thunder back
Flicker for flicker.

JOEL.

It is too dark for jest.
By Heaven, I saw a figure in that flash
Standing beneath a tree !—the man who saved me.

HUR.

Thou dreamest it.

JOEL.

Mark thou by the next glare !

HUR.

Then will it be most long in coming—ever
The watched pot slowly boils.

JOEL.

Not hundred paces
From where we sit.

256

HEBEL

HEL

My sword ! yet as in several times
We scarce shall meet it.
But ! that we meet again.

Enter ABEL

ABEL

I saw your fire, and ask to share its comfort
On this most dangerous night.

HEL

We are thy servants, sir.

HEBEL

Most glad to share with him who gave me life.

ABEL

But at no risk. Yet is death often fearful
Coming when wayward heart is full of sin.

HEL

Nay, death is death, come how or when it will.

ABEL

As soul is ever soul, or Cain's or Abel's,

Yet one is like the angels of the Lord,
The other—

HUR.

Damned with all his race.

ABDIAL.

For shame !

Speak not such evil thing on such a night.
Children of Cain are dearest to the Lord,
Who wills the joy of all men grieving for each.

HUR.

That has a harsher sound than suits my temper.

JOEL.

Peace, brother, peace !—the stranger means no harm.

HUR.

Nor I ; but have no mind thus to be schooled.

ABDIAL.

Nay, I would not offend—thy brother is right—
Nor yet withdraw one word that I have spoken ;
Rather would double them, for they are of
truth.

HCR.

So is it often true a man is ugly,
But stranger dies who shouts it in our ears.

ABDIAL.

Since faces are beyond our remedy,
Our words and acts are ever in our power ;
And, if a stranger show us how to mend them,
He were a fool indeed who listened not.

HCR.

What should be in my words that must be mended ?

ABDIAL.

The shadowing of doom so terrible
Over the half of men that angels shudder
At thought of one soul lost.

HCR.

A strange word *lost* !

ABDIAL.

Thou hast looked upward when the night was fair—
Not pitch-like thus—and marked its world of lights
In ever-ordered round ; its harmony
Of pictured joy. If one poor wanderer there—
An exiled unit from eternal praise—

Were flung off from its bounds to drift for
 ever
 Through the vast darkness of unthought-of space,
 It were weak symbol of the human soul
 That is *lost*.

HUR.

But where could soul be flung ?

ABDIAL.

To Hell !

Which is, in truth, the absence of all good,
 All help, all joy, all love, or hope of such.
 The soul that turns from God hath but herself,
 In her own flesh, unsaved, detested, foul,
 With each keen sin its own undying fire,
 For ever sinking through the night.

JOEL.

But sin

May be forgiven when we grieve.

ABDIAL.

And act

On grief ; taking the death God sends for it
 In thankful patience.

HEBER.

HUR.

Now, by those same stars,
Thou art learned, sir, in these most delicate matters.

ABDIAL.

It may be—time will tell. I fear ere morning
The swelling river will have quenched your fire.

HUR.

The river !

ABDIAL.

Hush ! now listen to its roar !
All day the thunders grumbled to the north,
For once the waters have outsped the clouds.

HUR.

I guessed not that the river was so near.

ABDIAL.

To-morrow's sun may see this valley river.
Meanwhile build up your fire—it may be too
Ere then you both shall need your strength. Stir
not
From this till I return. I know the banks,
And now will mark the rise. Be sure you stir not !

[*Exit* ABDIAL.]

HUR.

Now of a verity the strangest man
That I have met. It was strange comfort too
He shared all told. Why didst thou not ask him
What right was his to order thus ?

JOEL.

Nay, thou

Art elder, and I had no mind.

HUR.

Then I had—
Strongest. Yet as his bidding suits my mood—
Good-night ! for I will sleep.

SCENE III.

The River-bank.

HEBER.

HEBER.

I cannot look on them—
The mother's face, and their unheeding courage,
That plays with ruin as a child with fire—
She had her old smile still for me to-night—

Have each their separate pang, but deadliest
In eyes that made earth Heaven. I cannot look
On them. Oh, happy they who see no future,
Who still may think the hand they kissed the first,
Wrinkled and weak, will close their eyes in the end.
I am twice cursed, who know and may not fly—
Poor son of Cain, that hath his father's brow.

Alas ! how long the years looked on that night
I waited for her steps beside the river ;
Gone now like dream—sweet dream that rends my
heart

As the soft water's dalliance rent the rock
Whose arching shelter rises thus above me.
The hour has come to which my mother pointed ;
With it the deluge. By that flash I saw
The long foam lingering down the white brink, loath
To lose the chance of a new start. Ere morning
It will be out, if still the pitiless storm
Hold through the night in these great flakes of rain.
There was a time my rush homeward were joy,
Sure of good cheery blaze, and warmed wrap
In hands of love to meet me by my hearth.
But *now* —— O God, if I have sinned in youth,
Or by impatience of Thy high commands,
This be the pain, for it is very great !
Were there but hope—the faintest, flimsiest hope,

In shred of chance, that by the will of man
 Stern-struggling to the last, fate might be changed,
 Why, I could face—aye, roar like that—high-hearted,
 And with my eyes fixed on opposing joy,
 Fling back the ruin from my hard-held breath,
 Until the power that smiles on human courage
 Lent me a strength beyond these bodily nerves;
 What were the lightnings to me then but torch!—
 This monstrous teeming sky, but cool refreshment—
 The very hoarseness of the waves but war-music,
 More spiriting than ere my father's harp
 Rang out. But now it is that Power that binds me;
 Foreknowledge of His will that renders impotent
 The promptings of my natural energy.
 For me and mine earth is too narrow for flight,
 And highest peak but length of ling'ring pain.

Alas! did I not promise even now
 To seek and bring—I have no heart for jest,
 Else could I smile at my poor nestlings—smile!
 Poor children! the great wooer comes too surely;
 His weird grey clutch is lurking in these waves;
 Ne'er bore they purer burthen to the sea,
 Black headlong strife that hath its own strange peace.
 Perchance, in times to come, lone forms sin-wearied
 Will stand, as I stand now, above such tide,
 Half-shuddering at its chill, but all too tired

To bear one brave step more their load of ill ;
Perhaps such waves, more blest, will yet waft down
The warrior forms of virgins slain for truth,
While angel-smiles throw sweetest halos round
The tortured clay that once was angels' own ;
Such was my darling's had the knife struck deeper—
I saved her once—Oh, could I save her now !—
My love ! my love ! my patient, tender love !
Oh Sellah, could I once more feel thee mine,
Secure of life, freed from this brooding gloom,
This dread that I must see—I can not bear it—
The thought—

A step ! a form !

(*Enter ABDIAL.*)

ABDIAL.

A fearful night !

HEBER.

Truly most fearful !

ABDIAL.

Is the cottage thine
That upward fronts the water ?

HEBER.

Even mine !

HEBER.

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ABDIAL.

Then see to friends within !—the river rises.

HEBER.

Must rise.

ABDIAL.

And thou—

HEBER.

Thus watch it by these glares.

ABDIAL.

Watch it unmoved ?

HEBER.

Looks are deceitful things.

ABDIAL.

I spoke not of thy looks, but of thy acts.

The water rises, and thou standest thus.

HEBER.

In human impotence before the Lord.

When I had tied a kid for next day's slaughter,

I loved not well to look upon its face,

Nor now on my own children.

ABDIAL.

When the kid dies

It ends indeed—not so with human life.
Oh, son of Cain! brave friend before that Lord!
The destiny of death is on thy race,
For his dire sin, as warning to all times.
But thou and thine, in this thy suffering,
If patiently and well thou still wilt bear it,
Crowning with earnest death thy well-spent life,
Are dearer to the Love that rules us all
Than those that now shall live. No pain of thine
So nobly borne but will have endless guerdon,
And give great joy to God who dies for man.

HEBER.

I had forgotten that; yet not my own pain
Lies nearest to my heart.

ABDIAL.

I know it, friend—

Thou wilt not grudge me that great name, who share
With thee and thine the knowledge of God's times—
And therefore art thou dearest to His heart
Who yet shall die to save His friends from pain.
Now hear from me His promise!—be thyself;
Still persevering to the end; and no one
That thou dost love but shall be saved for ever!

Remember, hour shall come when God who loves
Each human soul with a far mightier love
Than that wherewith thou lovest her most dear—
When God shall feel the pains of death upon Him,
Endured for them, knowing they shall be lost,
Yet in His agony have human joy
In thee, and such as thee, who do His will.
That will is now that thou shouldst struggle bravely,
Thinking of souls that die not;—nor as yet
The end.

HEBER.

Sir, in thy words is such strange power,
I shall obey ere yet I ask from whence
Thy steps have met our sorrow.

ABDIAL.

Yet shouldst thou know
If words befitted time instant for action.
Above, where other river joins this flood,
A slowly-matted dam of trees and sand
Makes lake of hill-girt valley. When it yields—
As yield it will—the rush will sweep resistless
To feet above our heads. Haste, then, to save
Thy dear ones!—I have other work. Remember,
Each hour of time well spent may win joy worth
A universe like this! We soon shall meet
Again.

P

Act II.

SCENE I.

The Interior of the Cottage.

SELLAH, THERSAH, and ELLEH.

THERSAH.

He should be back ere now.

ELLEH.

Alas ! were we not rash to send him thus
To armed men ?

THERSAH.

Thou silly child ! alone
He out-matched score.

SELLAH.

When Heaven thus threatens,
It well may make a human peace ; and yet
Methinks the lightning less unwearied.

THERSAH.

But rain

More fearful still, in ever massive fall—
Such rain might shroud the cottage from their eyes.
Now, mother, let me show my father's light—
I have the tapers—see!

ELLEH.

Stop, stop, Thersah!

She loves no hand to touch them but her own.
Oh, mother! mother! what is this?

THERSAH.

Why, mother!

SELLAH.

My children!—my poor children!—bear with me!
And pray!—there is no help but in God's hand.

THERSAH.

Nay, mother, this is scarce an angrier night
Than that which brought such dawn as yesterday.
Oh, Elleh, tell her that the sun will soon
Be back to cheer us all.

SELLAH.

My children, pray!—

Let us but pray for grace to do God's will.

THERSAH.

Why, mother, Elleh is more brave than thou ;
And I so chide her for her chicken heart.
Where is the maiden courage that once bore thee
Blood-stained, but fearless, through their wicked
streets ?

SELLAH.

Gone with my maiden carelessness of heart.

THERSAH.

But may I not thus set the lights ?

ELLEH.

Oh, Thersah !

Canst thou not see she would not have it so ?

THERSAH.

Yet it can do no harm ; and they may grope now
Through the thick trees, like the poor blinded goat
That we so pitied. Stay ! I will steal out—
Yet not beyond thy voice—and watch the darkness.
This sack will shroud my head. May I not, mother ?

SELLAH.

So be it, then—but keep within our call ;
The storm is on the outer side, and scarce

In angriest gust will force the door from us.
Nay, Elleh, I am strong—hold thou the door!

THERSAH.

Come, Bidah!—Bidah, thou with me! We two
For hill or storm against the world. Now, courage
Within! We shall bring back good news. No
press
Is on the door.

SELLAH.

What a brave heart she has!

ELLEH.

Even as hers of whom my father tells,
Who strove to death against the sin of Cain.

SELLAH.

Courage and strength were ever with our race.
But for that sin our blood hath ruled the earth.

ELLEH.

And yet our men were slaves to sons of Seth.

SELLAH.

The coward few who lived when brave men died,
The broken culls of a fierce flock. Now call!

ELLEH.

Nay ; she returns.

THERSAH.

The rain is cloud-dropped river ;
Yet can I see the cottage passing well ;
The moon must be o'er all—'tis strange they come not !

SELLAH.

But few drops fell when first your father went ;
He may have wandered by the bank, and shelters.

THERSAH.

Yet is it scarcely night for wandering, mother.

ELLEH.

Oh, what a flash !

SELLAH.

Stand back, and shut the door !
Still we could breathe some twice before the thunder,
And that is change from worse. Let us but pray ;
Prayer can do everything. I remember once
Sitting alone with Melchah in the hut
(I told you not before, fearing the dread
Of such night tale should haunt its loneliness).
Your father being south for hand-wrought goods,

A push came to that door, and, as we stood,
 Startled, uncertain, a terrific roar
 Curdled the blood within our veins, answered
 At once from the north hill, and soon we heard
 The mighty cat-like steps circling us round—
 A lion and his mate ranging for food.
 We knew the roar, though well your father guarded
 The woods as now, giving no murderers rest.
 I seized a hunting-spear—see where it stands—
 While Melchah prayed. We knew the danger too,
 That they would leap upon the roof and tear down.
 What were the reeds and poles to their huge strength !
 But still they circled, and would wind at the door,
 Making no onslaught. Thersah, thou layest there
 A little thing asleep, and in that corner
 Just such another kid as thine is now.
 I loved it, and when Melchah, trembling, whispered
 To thrust it out through that small window-frame,
 That they might have a meal, I felt as sore
 As if she asked for my own arm.

THERSAH.

Oh, mother,
 That I had but been grown, and with thee then !

SELLAH.

My child, both thou and I, though thou art strong,

Had been poor match for those relentless jaws.
The mother's prayer did more.

Great Heaven ! what is that ?
Not thunder ; yet it shakes the cottage thus !

ELLEH.

The rushing of a mighty wind.

THERSAH.

Not so ;
The wind was higher far, the doors more pressed
That guard the windows riverward. This like
The roar of a great fall. Mother, I think
The stream is still some thirty feet below us.

SELLAH.

When last we looked upon it, even so.

THERSAH.

I never heard a sound like that before.

SELLAH.

Nor I. May God grant that your father is safe !

THERSAH.

Nay, he was in the wood—most surely safe ;
But as I live that roar is roar of waters—

Waters that surge and break in giant waves.
Tut, Elleh, cower not thus, we are quite safe.
Tut, fool ! why, what could reach us here ?

SELLAH.

It may be

The wind that changing makes the river louder.

THERSAH.

Whate'er it be, I will go out and know.

ELLEH.

Not yet ! not yet ! Oh, Thersah, go not yet !
I think I heard a something strike the hut.

THERSAH.

The spray and rain. Why should we fright our-
selves
To death, when we may see and fear no more ?
It is a curious sound. I will go out.

ELLEH.

Take care ! take care ! Again I heard the thud
Of something striking on the wall.

SELLAH.

And I.

THERSAH.

Then shall we know what strikes ere long. It
must be
Some feeble thing, or I had heard it. Hold you
The door!

SELLAH.

Then stand outside, my child!—no more.
Heaven guard your father! It is fearful sound.

THERSAH.

'Tis, as I said, the roar of waves. Now, listen!
Nay, let me go! Something is changed down
there!
By Heaven, water!—we are surrounded—see!

SELLAH.

Thy father! oh,—thy father!

THERSAH.

Let me go!

ELLEH.

She burst from me. I could not hold her, mother.

SELLAH.

It is the end—the end—and *he* not with me!

HEBER.

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ELLEH.

But I am, mother—I who love thee so.
Wilt thou not hold me as we die ?

SELLAH.

My darling !

ELLEH.

But why should it be death ? it may go down.

SELLAH.

My child, the world ——

THERSAH.

The water is going back
Fast, fast ! I stood beside and marked it.

SELLAH.

Now, Heaven be praised ! we yet may see your father.

THERSAH.

I will go out again and watch.

SELLAH.

Nay, go not !

Another rush may come. Elleh, the tapers !

Now will I show thy father's light !

THERSAH.

Well thought of ;
Old friends shine gaily out for him ! Hark ! hark !
Surely I heard a sound close by in the water,
And there—they hallo from beyond.
Mother !
Oh, Mother, what is this ?

ELLEH.

She has burst from me ;
She must have heard my father's voice.

THERSAH.

Then let us follow !

SCENE II.

A Hill-side.

HUR and JOEL.

HUR.

Now though the smile be watery,
It *is* a smile, and that is pleasant, boy.
My limbs are somewhat numbed after the night.
'T was strange we two should meet thus—Heber and I.

Methought his sense swam too, when he sprang off
To go down with the stream.

JOEL.

Losing no moment,
Yet finding sudden slackness as I think.

HUR.

Rush fierce enough at slackest, as thou didst find ;
But for thy help I now was rolling seaward.

JOEL.

Gibe not at me. After such deeds I feel
My meanness.

HUR.

Nay, ere father Adam learned
To swim better, he could have done no more,
Nor then done better work. Thy freshness saved us,
And one was worth the toil. Yet, had we known
The hut would stand, we might have bided our time.

JOEL.

Waiting for skiff, for which this hill still urges—
An island too.

HUR.

How well the stranger guessed

The river would put out our fire. Mark there
The white foam gathering to the trees we sat by !

JOEL.

I waded through them on my way to this.

HUR.

Thou knowest I love water, but such swimmer,
Except this son of Cain, ne'er crossed my path ;
They both swept out as lightly with their burthens
As I might unimpeded, and struck shore
Some hundred yards above thy aid.

JOEL.

The maiden

That clung to thee was heaviest.

HUR.

It may be.

Yet, had I now my choice, I took no other.
From first to last she seemed to feel my wishing ;
And, at that last, when I could speak no more,
Each nerve of my set frame being strung to reach
thee—

I still could hear her brave encouragement
Breathed in my ear. 'Twas she first saw thee too,
And, seeing, saved our lives. Had I not known

That where thou standest there was certain rest,
I scarce had struggled on. 'T was marvellous well
Thou hadst thy spear with thee.

JOEL.

I doubted then
Whether to stretch it forth, or still hold firm,
Yet felt without it I was gone.

HUR.

All thine
Was at its best. How far out thou couldst wade !

JOEL.

It is a gentle flat, doubtless, that lies
Between this hill's foot and the natural river,
Or well-nigh flat, with upward slope to the bank
Where the hut still stands clear.

HUR.

A glorious sight,
Now all done, is this glistening river-world !
But hunger-giving, Joel. It is well, boy,
Ours is the hill with goats, the other one,
Or other end, from which we ducks took river,
Is very charming with its well-washed groves,
But hath no dinner for its islanders.

I wonder will the son of Cain soon come
To tell us of that broiled kid ere the noon!

JOEL.

A noble man! Ne'er saw I such a form.
As tall as thine, but broader, as I think.

HUR.

And truly think; at all our boyish games
He ever mastered me, and would to-morrow
At manlier task. Yet have I seldom met
Him who could truly say the same.

JOEL.

His daughter—
She whom thou saved thus—has his every feature.

HUR.

It may be, as his heart. But, boy! poor boy!
Wouldst thou not fain be sailing in thy ark?
Last night had even sterner arguments
Than that which made thee love its comfort so.

JOEL.

Nay, 'tis the river here that swells—at home
They may be dry enough.

HUR.

If I were thou,
With that good axe I had canoe ere night;
To half outspeed the light for yonder hill
Whence we descended on the plain. There land
May well begin indeed.

JOEL.

If all will come,
I will work gladly at a boat. By night
A tree were down; some large trees edge the water.

HUR.

Remains the other stream.

JOEL.

For other trunk.
Groves cling to all its length.

HUR.

And how find room
And food for all, with lions, tigers, jackals,
In thy great boat?—and, worse than all—Cain's
children?

JOEL.

Yet Japheth loves ——

HUR.

Aye loves, but marries not.
Besides, the woman counts but with the man.
How save a *son* of Cain ?

JOEL.

That stranger said
That some were dearest to the Lord.

HUR.

The stranger,
But not my father, boy. His view was clear—
Especially since all his servants left him—
That no one might be saved but his own sons,
And those they wooed. Go thou and be one !

JOEL.

Hur ! Hur !
Curb thou that gibing tongue ! The Lord of all,
Who made this mighty earth, may well—nay, must—
Have ways beyond our thought.

HUR.

Yet gives that thought
To rule us. When I do what I feel base,
As I have done ere now, my will revolts ;
But not when I have striven to my best

To see, and may not. If thy heart now warn thee
To join thy father, in the Lord's name go !
I do not trust in him, and therefore go not.

JOEL.

Trusting or not, I scarce can think God wills
That I should leave thee in the danger thus.
If all will fly, I soon can shape fit boat ;
If none—will share the risk.

HUR.

Well spoken, boy !
A risk, if risk there be, should make all brothers.
[A pause.]

The sun is watery still, yet hath its brightness,
Waking some kindred glimmer in my mood
To sprightly word, as thine of yesternorn—
The sun, or being so near to death, and living—
And yet methinks that stranger's dream of hell
Might well chill heart more armed in proof than
mine—
To fall for ever through an endless darkness,
As if some trap-door opened in earth's shell.

JOEL.

Alone with sin for all eternity.

HUR.

In flesh God hath forsaken. If God made us,
And wills the laws of our mysterious frames,
Whereby we hear, and breathe, and have our limbs,
In this their strength, should He withdraw such help,
What can He leave but horror on the souls
Which they imprison still ? It hath truth's semblance.
Perchance this world is but a sign-world, Joel,
And blackening rottenness the sign of sin.

JOEL.

And yet on yesterday thou jeeredst at dream.
It is a fearful thought that such a fate
May yet be ours.

HUR.

For ever ! still for ever !
I know no word so dreadful as for ever !
To have no thought of love, or peace, or kindness ;
Nothing but pain and impotent rage for ever.
Yet all were just enough when we have turned
Of our free will from all the good we know.

JOEL.

Such thoughts had made a coward of thee last night.

HUR.

A coward ! no ; but braced my strength to action.

To save is to be good, and good is heaven.
The coward selfishness that turns from such
A hell begun—

Ha ! Heber from above !

(*Enter* HEBER.)

HEBER.

Kind friends, I had been with you both ere now,
I and my thanks, but for a herdsman's duties.
My hands are blood-stained still, and in this trickle,
Craving your pardons, I will cleanse them thus.

HUR.

Most freely given. Water is plenty, Heber—
Rather too plenty this fine morn ; not so
The things that boil and fry and savour sweetly.

HEBER.

More plenty than the bread should go with them ;
Our flour is all cut off in yonder hut.

HUR.

Now had we but the luck to stop there too !
Yet then the kids were on this side. Thus life
Is ever choice of ills.

HEBER.

The same as ever !

Thy brother, sir, was still the hungriest man
Years since, in word, that thou mightst hunt withal,
Halving his last crust when it came to deeds—
Yet in the hut is still a live thing left—
My daughter sorrows gravely for her goat.

HUR.

Shut up, poor wretch ! 'tis gravely to be hoped then
That it will learn the mystery of flour.
How will my father feed his goats, Joel ?

JOEL.

With sun-dried grass ; he hath compartment full,
For all that snatch their food to eat at leisure.

HEBER.

Thus marking forethought of the Mind that made
All things to suit their ends. Lions with claws,
The sheep with double pouch.

HUR.

My father, Heber,
Has still his view about the world being ended,
Or men who live thereon. How grave thou lookest !
Art thou believer too ?

HEBER.

My mother held him
As one inspired of Heaven, as I hold her.

HUR.

He builds each day for years a mighty ark
Which now begins to rot. In hundred chambers,
A happy family of birds and beasts,
He saves no fishes, make the oddest din
That my poor ears have yet been blessed with.

HEBER.

And yet you wander here. Were it not better
That charity began at home? A goat
Is but a goat, our sons ourselves.

JOEL.

Nay, sir;
My father's will had kept us both at home.

HUR.

Speak for thyself, young truant! Certain curse
Is ringing in mine ear on Hur, his eldest.
And yet I am a wretch to call thee truant,
Who share in love a brother's wandering.

HEBER.

Thou wert his favourite son.

HEBER.

HUR.

And might be still,
But for the curse that God sent Adam.

HEBER.

Sin !

Alas ! not sent, but chosen.

HUR.

I meant it not ;
Rather the other curse that eat the fruit.

HEBER.

For shame ! these words beseem not this dread time ;
Or us, who hope but through the promise given,
That woman yet shall crush the serpent's head.

HUR.

Thy hand ! I had forgotten thou wert father.

HEBER.

And I—

Now hear a friend ! friend you have bought,
Both bought at risk of life,—lose not a moment !
Thy brother has an axe, shape some light skiff
I tell thee moments are as rare as glitter
Of those bright stones the Southernns sell their lives for.

Get to your father and to safety. Go !
Such aid as I can give is but poor payment
Of half I owe.

HUR.

Not I ; we see things out
Together, as we roamed often of old.
'Tis strange how green thy memory is with me,
Despite thy blood which now I ban no more,
Having enough of curses of mine own.
But let the boy go !—Joel ; go !—I tell thee
Thy presence now is but a pain. Before
Thou scarce couldst doubt my father ; now with Heber
Confirming all with this sad face of his,
Doubt were impossible for thee. Go, boy !

JOEL.

Not by myself ;—the stranger said last night,
Who sinned should take the punishment of sin
In love. If all will strive for life, why, so
Will I. If none, I strive not either.

HEBER.

Go, both !
Words are but words, the curse of man thin air.

HUR.

Thou dost not ask me why it came, yet know !

Jeschah—thou wilt remember her—was Cham's wi.
Yet rules my home.

HEBER.

Alas ! poor earth ! what wonder
That these avenging waters gather thus,
When name that God hath given to make life dear,
The priceless jewel of our human loves—
Name that His fairest signs in air, or tree,
But typify, the truest image of Himself,
And His eternal loving, is thus trampled
Not by the bad, but by such men as thou.
Oh, man, if thou hadst ever had a wife,
Thou wouldst have known the deadliest sin of man
To man is but to breathe one thought that jars,
To snap one string, in the eternal harmony
Of wedded love !

HUR.

Thou art a son of Cain,
And larger than myself—yet I stand silent.

HEBER.

And saviour of the lives of me and mine.
I pray you, if I spoke unmeasuredly,
You will forgive me, both, setting it down
Somewhat to pains beyond my manly guidance—

Pains that make nerves too woman for my head.
I use the word in simple reverence
For truth and nature, giving each their gifts.

HUR.

Nay, if thy women but call man a rascal,
When he deserves the title, say no more ;
Yet are there other women in the world—
But this is foolishness ; for sin is sin
In man or woman. Joel, make the boat,
And in God's name be off !

JOEL.

Nay, I have spoken—
We can but do our best, and I do mine.

HEBER.

Youth's safer part is ever to be guided.
Yet, as this stranger's words have power to move
thee—
Whereat I marvel not—for his a presence
May well stamp thoughts as worthy of our trust—
I now will seek him through these narrowed
bounds,
Feeling most sure such thoughts will second ours.
Meanwhile, till in some hour our meal is ready,
I pray you both see to the boat.

HUR.

Nay, I am tired ;
But, Joel, thou must go, and I will sleep here
In the sun.

SCENE III.

Another part of the Hill.

THERSAH and ELLEH.

ELLEH.

[*Sings.*]

Rise, rise, O sun !
And gladden the air with a summer ray,
Flashing thy snow on the low cloud's spray,
And glimmer of pearls where the wild waves play
In their far-off run.
Rise, rise, O sun !

Kiss, kiss, soft wind,
The clinging green with thy sweet dry breath,
And wake the wee wings that lurk beneath,
All jaded and moist in the sleep that is death
To their gentle kind.
Awake them, wind !

THERSAH.

[*Sings.*]

Lo, we are thine !
 Votaries humble and damp—one fair—
 With half-drowned garb, and with tangled hair—
 Begging your graces, dear sun, good air
 To breathe and to shine.
 Lo, we are thine !

Maidens forlorn !
 Sweet sun, thine all !—and all thine dear air !
 Like two little finches of plumages rare
 Sent out to be dried by your pitiful care
 On this watery morn.
 Hear us, forlorn !

 It is enough.
 Our doggerel sounds most flat, now nature's self
 Pours down her mighty verse under our feet.
 Oh, Elleh, what strange strength is in those waves !

ELLEH.

And rhythm in their constant flow. They rise still.
 The rock that showed there like a fishing-float
 Scarce leaves a ripple now.

THERSAH.

 Yet, mark the track
 For many a foot above, where the first rush
 Swept down its leaves and slime.

ELLEH.

Then crossed my father.

THERSAH.

Nay, scarcely crossed: though then he must have
plunged.

ELLEH.

But wherefore should the waves be rising now,
Unless yon bank of cloud mark deluge northward ?

THERSAH.

There is no gladness in my father's mood.
Or mother's even yet.

ELLEH.

And some faint words
She gasped last night, in her extremest dread,
Would seem to link that secret gloom of theirs,
Which we have marked and marvelled at so
long,
With these white waters rise.

THERSAH.

Last night such thought
Had well becomed the time: but now its awe
Fades in the glimmer of thy summer sun.

ELLEH.

Wert thou much frightened in those dreadful
waves ?

THERSAH.

Frightened ! not I ; but longed for skill to help
The strength which I but clogged with useless
burthen.

ELLEH.

And he ?

THERSAH.

First jested, and then fought for life.
A perilous fight enough, but nobly won.

ELLEH.

My swimmer seemed to waft me with the ease
An angel might have swept through stormy sky
To paradise.

THERSAH.

Thine is the slighter form,
Yet would I take my swimmer from the world,
Such other night, nor envy even my mother.
He has the strength of heart that makes one feel
To die is but a jest when we die well.

ELLEH.

Alas ! that dying well !—how are we sure
That we are dying well ?

THERSAH.

Why, he was sure,
Since he was dying but to save. Thy swimmer
May well have ran no risk, but mine ran grave one,
And knew the risk, yet jested as he knew.

ELLEH.

He seemed much spent as he sat on the rocks.

THERSAH.

Then wishing that a river poured with wine,
Though at a certain risk of sage demeanour,
From that which he had drank.

ELLEH.

I would we *had* wine,
His brother seemed so delicate and cold.
I thought my mother would have bade us ask
All to our fire this morn.

THERSAH.

Tut ! this good sun
Warms them as it warms us. Lend me thy comb !—

Well saved that too. Was it not rare our poor
rest
Should give such cosy shelter ?

ELLEH.

And the sprays
We gathered half in sport, how sweet their cheer,
Warming our mother then !

THERSAH.

And our own selves—
I liked its comfort well, if thou wert too full
Of thy dear delicate youth for such mean joy.
I wonder where our father may have led them !

ELLEH.

Most like, to the great rocks above the trees.
But *my*—why *my* youth, pray ? He had but eyes
For her he helped to save—most kindly ones.

THERSAH.

Tut ! his was but the jackal's part—reversed.

ELLEH.

They could not both swim with thee, and be saved
Both in the end. But of that dying well—
How wert thou sure that *thou* wert dying well ?

THERSAH.

I did not think of it, yet feel I do
For years all that thy sanctity commands.
I grumble, but I do it; and so leave
Thy own small mouth to answer all such questions.
But, see! where comes my father?

[*Enter* HEBER.]

HEBER.

Hast thou seen

The stranger who saved Elleh in the night?
I have made now the circuit of the hill,
But find him not.

THERSAH.

He passed not by us here.

The waters seem to rise, father.

HEBER.

They rise.

You scarce may mark the cypress by the tomb,
The one dark spot amid a vale of water.

THERSAH.

A wider vale than this, but sleepier—
Hast thou ere seen such rush as that before?

HEBER.

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HEBER.

Never.

THERSAH.

How much it will amaze their streets
In the great southward city!

HEBER.

Jest not, child,
At that might make an angel weep! If half—
Aye, half—the rise be there upon the waters,
A myriad lives of men are quenched ere now.
Except the palace of the King, no hill
Varies the plain to human sight.

THERSAH.

And therefore
The waters will be lost on either side.

HEBER.

Hope it in human charity. By this
The waves have dashed into the hideous caves
Where vice bedecks herself with pleasure's weeds
And worse.

ELLEH.

Alas! we grieved for little lives

They must have crushed o'er all the midnight plain.
The rabbits, father, that we watched so often
At play when we were resting—all, all gone!

HEBER.

Nay, grieve for human souls, my child, which,
snatched
From couch of sin rose-garlanded, may whirl
For ever and for ever through a grief
Of which these waves are but poor symboling.
How many a banqueter might rest last night
His sated head on perfumed down, to whom
Eternity shall give no pleasure more!
How many a lover, if such are in truth
In that great den of baser sin, was hurled—
Or may be ere another sun comes round,
And she he loves—to distances as wide
As yonder sky can separate from sky,
Ne'er to be joined again!

Now, get you back,
And help your mother. Ha! what have we here?

THERSAH.

A skiff that seeks the hut—plainly a skiff—
And yet the sunbeams somewhat daze our sight—
At least the figure of the man stands out
Plainly—and see! the paddle flashing in the stream!

HEBER.

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HEBER.

Yet is he in no skiff—sitting too low
By far for skiff to float o'er such a tide.
It is the younger stranger, as I live !

ELLEH.

Alas ! when all are safe, why does he run
Such risk again ?

HEBER.

I see it now—two poles
Joined trebly with short stays. On one he sits—
The central stay. It is a clever fancy,
And safer than a boat in such a stream,
For overturned it lived again. Well fought !

THERSAH.

See ! he has gained the hut.

ELLEH.

And enters now.

THERSAH.

Nay, enters not ; but stoops. Why, it is Bidah ;
Bidah he carries in his arms !

HEBER.

HEBER.

I told them

That thou didst grieve for her.

THERSAH.

He holds her—see !—

Between his legs as they float down. Oh, father,
Can we not help them both ?

HEBER.

Thou thoughtst not of it

Until thy Bidah was at risk. Best help
Had been to guard our tongues.

ELLEH.

Again he crosses

The torrent now. Alas ! how dangerous !

HEBER.

But to the goats, for he will swim at worst
And gain his raft once more, if he lose not
The paddle—*that* were dangerous.

THERSAH.

Nay, now

He passes the mid-stream and makes no wreck.
Somewhere beneath us they will land.

Bidah ! Bidah !

Act III.

SCENE I.

Over the River.

HEBER.

HEBER.

It will be gone ere morn.
That last pale flicker of the struggling moon
Showed the joined torrent breaking on the wall ;
A little higher and the clay must yield.
How proud I was the day I first—Great Heaven !
All that that little hut has been to me !
There many a fathom down amid the waves,
I tied the boat upon the morn, the two
Like loving sisters mounted the green bank ;
Catching them ere they reached the door with laugh,
That I should be the first to show the ‘palace.’
‘Our palace!’ Ah, what a laugh that was ! Sellah,
Sellah, is it not strange that I can live,
And yet bear pain like this ?

Yet some bear worse.

She might have died the night after the fever,
And then I must have lived. I still can feel
The throbbing comfort in the poor white wrist
Through which the whole dear river of life's joy
Poured then for me, and see my mother's face
Guarding the other side as sentinel.
A prayerful sentinel of life at war,
With the insidious skirmishers of death.
It is no skirmish now. He comes in force.
Wide as the skyward margins of the earth
His rushing dread will soon be on all men,
With lightning banners glaring through the sky,
And flashing of a myriad waves beneath.
Alas! was there no hope? Had we gone ever
Westward, might we not find some boundary wall,
Some peak above the bottomless descent,
Where we might still o'erstand the headlong ruin,
And join our pain some little hours? Surely
Man's death is ever end of life—must be
Its end. And yet we strive, and have our joys.
That first day that we landed thus, I knew
That we must die, yet felt no pain; or but pain
That I had left those giant men to fate
Unshared by me; pain all too soon forgotten
In joys that quench around me as I stand.

Beneath that darkling surge is the old garden

Where many a time returning from the chase
 Laden at eve, I watched her from the brow
 Trimming her vines, or hoeing through her plants,
 Until the times came she might work no more ;
 But sitting watched me fish from the long bank,
 Twining with deftest finger the soft web
 That earned rest. Now her little garden is dead ;
 The black remorseless current is its grave,
 As it will soon be——

Oh, my love ! my love !

I think I shall go mad. Men do go mad.
 Hur thinks his father mad, who is but wise.
 And they might live—they, and perchance their
 wives.
 Poor Sellah thinks their wives, and so has
 heart.

I saw her brightening the children's hair,
 Who are too bright already, fair young things !
 For them it was all joy to be together
 The saved and saviours in the sun to-day.
 They knew not it was but the flickering
 Of life's last light for them and us. Alas !
 Should I not warn more deeply than I warn ?
 I have no heart for it. These others know,
 And one at least believes ; and they will speak.
 And so the dreadful thought will slowly darken
 Their yet half-hoping minds. It is best thus.

From those poor trees I saw the boat afar
That brought our mighty leader with the stream.
He came to give us joy, as now these strangers
Come for our death. And yet he died—but death
Might make the angels envy. And the King—
The King was tired of life. He had not died
If Sellah would have shared his wandering.
It may be death is harder now to me
Than most men, being strange. Others have friends
Struck down by lingering maladies,
Who smile and give their hands, and yet all know
They scarce will be alive by the next moon.
And so they grow accustomed to the fate
Whose wide uncertain certainty hath solace
From very habitude. For me he smote
But twice; in life two blows; and yet, methinks,
Had I seen legions who have died and die,
Here standing with this ruin round my heart,
Where once was little Paradise, the same
Unchanging agony mastered its powers,
Feeling for me, all things but I and mine
Are as the bubbling of an idle stream
That murmurs, and is past. Each broken wave
That is human must have voices in itself
Destined to sound through deep eternity,
But *my* ear dulls their distant flow. So star,
The faintest light-grain of the wondrous fires

That gem the unclouded patience of the night,
 May in itself be world of lustre glad'ning
 A myriad beings greater each than I,
 But were they all swept from my gaze for ever,
 The void were less for me than that cold wave
 Beneath my feet has made in these dim hours,
 Never to fill again.

How long the night is !
 The moon seems clinging to the zenith, that once
 Stole round the sky, ere the aroused sense,
 Waking to joy, could well believe night gone,
 Save from the freshen'd vigour born of rest.
 Now if I sleep, one hour seems five, and dream
 Wearies my blood with strange fantastic horrors.
 I climb for ever fearful mountain sides
 That toppling bend over our heads at last ;
 Or seek my children through the gloom of waves
 That lash among dark trees, hearing her call—
 How now ?

(Enter SELLAH.)

SELLAH.

It is but I—the night was so long
 Without thee, I have come. The children sleep
 As calm as if the angels watched their slumbers.
 And they *do* watch them, Heber.

HEBER.

Poor, poor mother !

A night, or few nights more, and thou shalt see -
That sight—never, never again !

SELLAH.

For shame !

Where is the pretty song that thou wouldst sing
Of man's soul holding in itself all joy
That we have ever known when we are good ?
I have a little vow that thou wilt sing it
For me to-night. See, I have brought the harp !—
Oh, Heber !

HEBER.

It is sop for death—first sop.
The jaded strings may stay his ravening maw
Some little minutes more. So I have heard
Men throw their babes to wolves. How couldst thou
think
That I might sing ?

SELLAH.

Heber !—Heber !—

HEBER.

Forgive me

I am rebuked. And yet, if thou couldst read
The thoughts that fret me into madness thus,
I were forgiven a deeper wrong.

SELLAH.

Forgiven !

Forgiven by me ! Oh, Heber, I am harp,
Thy harp that thou must play on evermore,
Who have none now but me. Nay, as I cling,
We are the harp—we two ; I but dull chords
That have no melody save from thy strength,
Poor harp ! poor harp ! and I was jealous sometimes ;
How gladly would I wrest thee from thy grave !

HEBER.

Our grave—it has but shown us how to die !

SELLAH.

Nay, it had shown it better had it sank,
Revealing its sweet secrets to the last.
It taught us how to die that night we sat,
We two, beside the stream when thou wouldst
follow
The great good man through all his perilous task.

HEBER.

Alas ! I loved not then as I love now.

SELLAH.

My heart was thine that eve to its last thought.

HEBER.

And mine with thee, but not with earth and thee.
Thou hadst not then made every separate act
Of our poor lives—the very food we eat,
And plant and toil for, sleep, rest, word, being
 shared,
Grow into priceless joys. I then but felt
The angel in thee, meeting soul of mine
With promise of eternal harmonies
To which these other harmonies of sound
That wake weird echoes down our human hearts,
Are but faint symboling, and the strange rapture
Then first felt made the earth itself seem narrow
To my young fancy, lit with joy and hope
To mystic depths beyond all outward show.
Now I have loved as father, husband, man,
Blunting, it may be, keener spirit-sense
With the plain joys of human tenderness.

SELLAH.

Nay, such should rather wake its deepest vision
Still keener as most true. Since our son died
I have thought more of Heaven.

HEBER.

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HEBER.

And I of thee,
Feeling what loss is when we lose the least.

SELLAH.

Yet should such loss be not to us as others
Who have been told the secrets of the Lord.

HEBER.

That are to me to-night but as the orb
That hides behind this ever-deepening gloom.
I know its disk is there—marked it but now—
But catch no comfort of its distant ray
Through these dense masses weighting thus the
air.

So know I God is good, and try to feel it,
But *do* feel that my pain almost outstrains
My human will. There is no dream of mine
But grows more earthly, even with earth's loss ;
No thought of happiness but clings more dearly
To that which passes now from thee and me.

SELLAH.

But I am with thee still—will be for ever,
And our own darlings, and thy mother, Heber.
Oh, think of all the joy to meet once more
When death is past with its cold misery !

HEBER.

When death is past :—but now it is not past.
 Yet am I less than man to daunt thee thus,
 Who should be still thy spirit's stay, while thy form
 Can lean on mine as it leans here. These strangers
 Might live, yet will not.

SELLAH.

Will not live alone—
 Nor leave us till the times bring forth the fruit,
 Their gloom seems pregnant of—then but to share,
 It may be, safety. Heber, they are sent
 To snatch our dear ones from their grave.

HEBER.

Rather

To share with us the punishment of sin.
 Cain sinks in thee, in them, rebellious pride.

SELLAH.

The younger hath no pride. His brow is soft
 Almost as Elleh's own, and beautiful.
 He is no sinner—that I feel.

HEBER.

Who hangs

On Thersah's laughing words, that marks him not.
 Her goat hath more of gratitude.

HEBER.

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SELLAH.

Being saved

She is most grateful too.

HEBER.

To Hur, accursed—

A just man's eldest born.

SELLAH.

The curse is on her

Who tempted him from right.

HEBER.

Rather on both.

Such sin must ever earn the hate of God.

Yet should I scarcely speak, who am accursed,

I and my little ones.

SELLAH.

Not cursed, but loved.

Oh, think of those dear words of yesternight!

HEBER.

I can not think of them, or think of aught

But death that severs thus.—It grows so dark

I scarce can see the cottage, but it stands.

HEBER.

SELLAH.

I mark its lines still deepening the gloom.

HEBER.

So Adam may have looked back through the night
Upon the lofty walls of Paradise.
Yet Eve was with him still, and life.

SELLAH.

But conscious
Of his own sin that brought him thus to death
In punishment, not love.

HEBER.

And dost thou think
That I am sinless!—who yet changed not now
With Adam and his many hundred years,
Having no Eve beside me but my wife.

SELLAH.

Alas! speak kindly of our mother, Heber,
Who sorrowed with such sorrow.

HEBER.

She *was* thy mother—
Yet but for her this ruin came not now.

SELLAH.

She hath had pains may well make us forget
The sin in the endurance—she who bore
The murderer ——. Alas ! that fearful sound !
Oh, Heber !

HEBER.

Sweet ! Yet is it but new thunder,
And that is scarcely strange.

SELLAH.

It is not thunder.
Ne'er heard I such a peal. Rather some groan
Of Nature's agony.

HEBER.

Nay, man dies now ;
Nature is safe enough.

SELLAH.

But servitor
Of dying man. Methinks, wert thou not with me,
I should die here—my inmost being trembles.

HEBER.

Thou must grow used to horrors worse than these ;
They but begin.

HEBER.

SELLAH.

If God leaves thee to me,
And I may rest upon thy bosom thus,
I can be happy while I tremble.

HEBER.

My own !
While will is ours, we scarce shall separate.
But mark the river now ! I see no hut !

SELLAH.

Nor I ; yet has the gloom so strangely deepened,
I hardly see the waters under us.
It may be there.

HEBER.

Our poor hut has gone !

SELLAH.

Then peace
Be with it ! We are here who made its bliss.
We and thy mother, Heber, and the girls,
And our brave boy.

HEBER.

Gone !—gone !—as yesterday
I sang of joy the river brought us down—
Me and my mother—that brings now our ruin.

SELLAH.

Which is as ruin of the seed that seems
To die, ere yet it gives forth hundredfold.
Oh, Heber, speak to me !

Again that groan
In the far darkness. I grow faint with dread.
The suffering earth itself thus warns man.

HEBER.

Nay,

It is but thunder muffled in the hills,
Or in this general war of surging waters.
Yet does the earth warn—warn with these fierce
waves,
Its myriad springs send ever windening forth.
Still inch by inch the deadly current rises.

SELLAH.

Oh, Heber, are there awful things in death,
Dread sounds like those but now, and we alone ?

HEBER.

I know not, child, who would have dread enough
Of being alone, to feel no other dread.

SELLAH.

Three nights before thy mother died, I heard—

Sitting in darkness, for all slept but I—
A heavy tread pass by my very side.
It was as if some ponderous form had stood
Beside her bed, and slowly strode away.
And as I heard, a sudden chill went through me,
Stopping my heart, who knew no step had come.
I lit the lamp, but no one woke but she ;
And as she marked the horror in my face,
Heard all with her sweet smile, and bid me pray—
Prayer for the dead, but speak to none—and slept
Almost ere I had finished. Were she with us,
I should not fear in death.

HEBER.

It is all darkness
Like this most monstrous gloom ; yet well I know
Our cottage is but dream, and pain and ruin
Brood through the pitchy horror. So it may be
Beyond.

SELLAH.

I see thy mother's face, Heber,
So happy and so calm, blessing us both,
As though the glimmer of that other land
Lit then our earthly threshold, and I feel
She led to joy, not pain. That stranger, too—
There is a peace about his very strength.

I felt no harm might reach us from the waves,
When I saw Elleh in his care.

HEBER.

I sought him
All day, but found not; the young son of Seth
Would seem to feel as thou, for word of his
O'erbore our counsel.

SELLAH.

Were they not most strange,
The words he spoke to thee on yesternight?

HEBER.

It may be. All is now too strange to mark
One strange thing from the rest; and yet—
Listen!
Stand back! another rush of waters as I live!
Hear how they break there at our very feet!

SELLAH.

Yet almost silently they stole upon us.

HEBER.

Dulled now amid the universal surge
That heaves up thus amid the darkness. Still
More back!

HEBER.

SELLAH.

Oh, Heber, there again that sound !

HEBER.

It is the distant fall of waters. Mount ! mount !

SCENE II.

A Slope above.

HEBER and SELLAH.

SELLAH.

The children !

HEBER.

They are most safe ; the topmost wave
Fell short by full a tree's length of their rest,
And now—hear how the lashing still goes down,
As the wide current settles in the darkness.

SELLAH.

But the dread ! I had never lived without thee.

HEBER.

The fall was deepest here on the mid-stream,
Bent by the hills from their young ears.

HEBER.

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SELLAH.

And the men !

HEBER.

The very spray scarce touched the rocks they slept in.

SELLAH.

Sleep ! earth itself dissolves. How did we come
here ?

I scarce remember but the burst and roar ;
All seems a hideous dream of rushing horror.

HEBER.

I bore thee in my arms up the last steep.
Once a quick crest palsied my flying feet ;
Another yard and we were as the dust
It brushed from off our path.

SELLAH.

Still heart on heart,
Thou had'st not left me. Nay, I can stand alone ;
A lightning's glimmer now were almost welcome.

HEBER.

Whence could the waters come ? It is no yielding
Of sudden dam that barred a flooded vale—
Look ! look before us ! surely something passes ?

HEBER.

SELLAH.

A monstrous mass of gloom ; I see it looming,
And feel—oh, Heber, it is death.

HEBER.

The wave is—
This but some floating ruin it may bear
Upon its rush.

SELLAH.

A ruin !—what could tower
So through the air that seems to grow lighter
To let the horror pass with that strange glimpse
Of the waving pall that funerals the earth ?
Some shape of evil glooms thus through the darkness ;
Our mother told of such in the old times.

HEBER.

Whate'er it be, child, it hath passed ; this night
Lends its own hideousness to all things.

SELLAH.

But there *are* mighty powers of evil ; witness
The hate that marred our race in Paradise.

HEBER.

And well such hour might tempt them from their
lair ;
I fear them not—who can but die, and must.

SELLAH.

Alas! death is but gate; our all still lies—
Again! again! oh, Heber, mark again!

HEBER.

Another mass; and surely a pale light
Makes ghastlier margin of its lines, that show
More clearly than before—a floating cliff!

SELLAH.

It is the end; all things have changed—rocks, water—
The groan was of dissolving nature's throes.

HEBER.

It is most strange; the very air grows chill,
As if with dread. Still I can mark far off
The monstrous form as it veers downward.

SELLAH.

The children!

Let us go back!

HEBER.

Look! as I live more come,
Thinning the air with their all-spectral glimmer—
The ghosts of hills.

HEBER.

SELLAH.

A ghastly spirit-world
Of floating mockery.

HEBER.

Spirit or truth,
It were bold deed to climb those shadowy steeps,
And so ride on to safety.

SELLAH.

Heber ! Heber !
Oh speak not thus ! I faint with dread—the children !

HEBER.

Mark with what stately grace their giant forms
Swoop down the heaving gulf ! Surely the moon
Looks forth to give that pale blue light ?

SELLAH.

Great heaven !
Yon fearful mass will crush us as we stand !

HEBER.

Not so. The seething waves break through, nor reach
The rock there at our feet. Yet have we yards
The less of life. Such may have been the forms

That brooded first o'er the unstaunched world
 Ere yet—why dost thou stare so? Sellah! Sellah!
 Oh, look not thus! Sellah! Sellah!—speak to me!
 They pass!—we are unhurt! Sellah! my own!
 My darling! rouse thee—speak! Sellah! Sellah!
 O God! can this be—What shall I —.

(Enter ABDIAL.)

ABDIAL.

She faints!

Lo I have water in my hands!

SELLAH.

Heber!

HEBER.

My own!—here with thee—here!

SELLAH.

It was too awful!

His face was hell.

HEBER.

Whose face?

SELLAH.

I could not bear it.

Where am I, Heber?

HEBER.

HEBER.

Here in my arms. Mine : mine

SELLAH.

My darling thine. And he has gone for ever ?

ABDIAL.

For ever.

SELLAH.

Heber ! Heber ! such look ! Methought
My very life was frozen. May we not pray ?—
To bear that pain and live !

ABDIAL.

Pray ! The Mercy
That rules is infinite.

HEBER.

What look ? Sellah,
Thy fancy wanders.

SELLAH.

Then thou sawest not
That fearful form ? Oh, Heber, I am so glad.
It was a pain the less for thee.

HEBER.

A form !

SELLAH.

The giant's held down in his agony—
Alas the horror of the thought! My own,
Ask me not yet!

ABDIAL.

She saw thy father's face.

HEBER.

My father! He who had my mother's prayers!

ABDIAL.

Thy father's father.

HEBER.

Cain the fratricide.

ABDIAL.

Who may have lain for ages on the ice.
The northward flood is breaking.

HEBER.

To descend
The harbinger of ruin to his race!

ABDIAL.

Rather of safety, who are saved in thee,
Steadfast to end.

HEBER.

HEBER.

Then it was ice that passed
In those strange shapes. Oft have I dreamed of such ;
Yet scarcely of such spectral night as this.
But how could ghost be bound, being spirit ever ?

ABDIAL.

The Lord might give a body to its pain ;
Or this dread semblance might have been but shade
Passing athwart our minds ; or evil will
That chose such form of horror.

HEBER.

I saw it not.

ABDIAL.

Having, it may be, pains enough without,
The hate most deadly can but strike at worst
As the Lord grants.

SELLAH.

Who now sends thee to him
With thy calm words.

ABDIAL.

That have indeed been sent ;
Oh, friends, think you the Lord who counts the
grains

That nod upon the summer plain for man,
 Who teaches the sweet prattling of the birds
 To breathe soft thoughts into his heart—think you
 The Lord, unmoved, can watch your virtuous hearts
 In this the trial sent but for great joy?
 Know every sigh submissive to His will,
 Which is the will of love all-wise, is treasured
 In power that magnifies, till the poor pain
 Shall glow to joy so bright, the endless stars
 Were dull to it for ever. For you who know
 That God will die for man in human suffering
 Pain should be dear, being still the gift He asks
 From heart to heart, to be repaid as God pays.
 There shall be those, in the great times to come,
 Who would not wish one earthly hour without pain
 Their incense to the Lord.

HEBER.

But shall such have
 A wife and children?

ABDIAL.

Some shall, it may be;
 But long ere that, husbands and wives will stand
 Before their murderers, side by side to die;
 And mothers smile upon the tortured frames
 Of boys they bore, in sweet encouragement
 To suffer and be strong; then truest mothers

Offering their old pains for their young saints ;
Until o'er all the earth a martyr'd blood
Shall smoke in sacrifice to Him who gave
His own the first.

HEBER.

Some dream of this I had
I know not how—yet we hold pain first ill.

ABDIAL.

As you might hold that darkness was the earth
Now looking round, yet are there hills beyond
This roar of waters that will light with day.
So pain's brief clouds should melt before the sun,
Whose faith is purest human joy. Remember
The hour shall come when the Omnipotent wills
To take His comfort from poor earthly hearts
That have endured as you are now enduring.
It is that thought can make a heaven of pain.

HEBER.

I have been cowardly beyond all thought ;
Thou spokest yesternight of efforts given
To win souls to the Lord. What may we do ?

ABDIAL.

Be calm, and suffer bravely ; help all men.
Or them that God hath sent to thee and thine.
Know in my veins some kindred current pours

Of Adam's eldest-born, as I hereafter
 May with more words impart. Meanwhile I tell thee
 This ice is of the wall that northward spreads
 The frozen bulwark of the earth. Its fragments
 Thus floating by us, mark a strange unrest ;
 An hour may turn to ruin.

HEBER.

Thinkest thou then
 The mass confines an ocean ?

ABDIAL.

So I deem ;
 Which rising shakes its bounds, as rousèd lion
 Crumples the bruised reeds of its lair. I know,
 Steep upon steep, the rugged mass extends
 Along the moonlit margins of the north,
 And if beyond its piercèd depths is swelling
 The force of an illimitable sea,
 As from these brackish waters, and their depth
 I gather, soon the wall must fail, and failing,
 The flood begins.

SELLAH.

Oh be thou with us, Sir,
 And we shall fear no ill.

ABDIAL.

I shall be with thee—
 I and thy husband.

Act IV.

SCENE I.

Another part of the Hill.

HUR and JOEL.

HUR.

I tell thee, boy,
If thou keepest gaping thus for sights and wonders
The water may be on us ere thy raft
Will swim the goat. Since that first pole fell there,
A foot of precious sod has gone.

JOEL.

Methought
It strangest sight the earth had ever seen.

HUR.

Aye, strange enough, and strangest being here ;
But earth has seen strange sights thou mayest depend.
Heber will tell thee twenty such pass'd down
At midnight ; then when that most monstrous roar
Woke us to world one cataract—Poor boy !
Thy ark is floating, if its bottom holds.

JOEL.

Yet as we came our steps were ever downward.

HUR.

I tell thee they *are* strange those floating masses ;
Something must shrewdly shake their northern bed.

JOEL.

Most strange and beautiful ; that last seem'd crystal—
A mass of crystal floating on the waves.

HUR.

Pity the sun was hid, and greater pity
I coax'd thee from thy safety.

JOEL.

Coax'd ! why I came
Of my free choice, rather against thy words.

HUR.

Then must my memory be passing bad ;
But milk once spilt is spilt milk. Believe me,
We were most wrong to frame the raft down here.
Fit thou the poles, and I will carry them
Up to the flat above. It will give time.
And should another rush come, as the wise deem,
Or so I gather from mysterious words,
The goats will wait on our provisioning,
Clinging with all life to that vantage-ground.

JOEL.

It is well thought of ; when we finish these,
We both can carry them to the hill's crest.

HUR.

Nay, thou must ever frame with thy deft hand.

JOEL.

I scarce have heart to work, fearing at last
No one will use our toil.

HUR.

But thou wilt use it ;
Granting the waters overflow the earth,
And that the cumbrous venture hold its own,
All living eyes must see the ark afar
Upon the level waste of waves. Thou and thy wife
Are destined to live down the flood. Blush not !
If we can get thee such a partner, Joel,
As gladden this poor hill, it will be solace
For stealing thee from peace. Solace to me,
Who have my own remorse, boy.

JOEL.

Why not save all ?

The raft will float us all.

HUR.

And kids to match ?

I doubt it. But a hundred times I tell thee

No son of Cain must people the cleansed world ;
That Heber holds, just as our Father.

JOEL.

Thou
Art not of Cain, so thou mayest save thy wife.

HUR.

How should I find her ? By our love, my boy,
I had no special craving for thy deck
With such dear freight.

JOEL.

Jeschah is not thy wife.

HUR.

But hath been my undoing, as I hers.
No, Joel ; as we bake so we must eat.
I wish too well to youth and goodness, boy,
To seek to graft their fair show on my ruin.
We trail not the young vine round seared trunk
The lightning flash has riven. Heber and I,
Who met as boys, now join our fates at last.

JOEL.

But thou mightest save—

HUR.

Not I ; but thou, who shalt.
I wish I had thy young unstained heart,

And ten big rivers should not daunt me now,
Knowing no traitorous nerves would mar the venture.
Despite her slighter form and sweet soft face,
The younger maid was calm, even as her sister,
Facing the wave that night.

JOEL.

A gentle girl :
Thoughtful and staid and kind.

HUR.

Markedst thou her cheek
This morn, praising thy poles that saved the goat ?
So she will praise thy raft, saving herself.
Ne'er bore so rough a skiff so sweet a burthen.

JOEL.

She is most good.

HUR.

Yet now I think on't, the beast
Was none of hers, and first-held gave a joy
Might well have strain'd its life out.

JOEL.

Goats have tough lives.

HUR.

And love but seldom kills. It may be, boy,

Thou wouldst have been the goat for just that minute.
Blushing again? Well, well; she is the stronger
Thing to be thought of on these poles.

JOEL.

Mind thou
Thy axe and not my blushing. That last spar
Is too long by a yard.

HUR.

Joel! Joel!
I love thee, boy, and now would see thee happy,
Whose love for me has brought thee to this strait.

JOEL.

Then share this raft, and make the others share it.

HUR.

Begin with her. Before this dim sun's setting
Let her sweet troth be thine.

JOEL.

How should I ask,
Who scarce may speak when she is near, and feel
To love of hers less than her goat.

HUR.

Being girl,
Who never love, or show their loves, till woo'd.

JOEL.

I doubt it—doubt that tremulous human heart
Can so o’ermaster its own impulses—
Like gentle tendrils straining to the light—
As to make love seem nipp’d indifference
To him who loves again. There is a wooing deeper
Than ere trick’d words out in sweet sentences,
Breathing through stammering speech and downcast
eye ;
If such can win no one responsive cheer,
It hath no love in which to hope.

HUR.

Joel !

Such wooing wrongs the wooer. Trust it not ;
And least in times like these, when lives may hang
Upon the tensure of an hour. Mark how the mass
Of rolling vapour lowers on us now !
The hilltop soon will be in cloud. Boy ! boy !
Lend me thy troth, and ere this night is over,
It shall be knit in hers whom thou shalt save—
A Deluge were cheap race for such a prize.
Nay, answer not ! I bear these poles aloft,
It may be soon to meet with other answer.

[*Exit* HUR.]

JOEL.

Not such as thou wouldst find. I have no hope
In word of his or mine—or hope like his,

Who have my own. And yet as yesterday
 I thought the world with him must be all gladness.
 It was such joy to hear his cheery voice,
 And share the thinking of our sever'd years ;
 Such joy to feel the sweet spring of the grass,
 And drink the free breath of the laughing flowers,
 With no will but mine own to rule my steps.
 And now in this strange darkness gathering round,
 And yonder headlong roar of the wild flood,
 I scarce have thought but of death, yet feel no pain—
 Rather a pleasure that we die together,
 If it must be, we die now—she and I.
 These very birds have some instinctive feel
 Of ruin brooding round us, wavering
 Thus through the noisy break my axe has made,
 Who soon must strive like swimmers o'er the earth,
 Flitting from top to top with desperate wing.
 I would not be a bird if the worst come.
 Yet are we not but birds of feeblér power,
 Whose pinions I frame now with these rough stems,
 To dash amid the breakers till the chill
 Of endless horror quench our lives at last ?
 Not so. We strive for life with chance of life,
 And love in hope that we may love for ever.
 Surely with that poor love now watching her
 Amid ——

A voice ! how my weak cheek grows pale !

[*Enter SELLAH, THERSAH, and ELLEH.*]

SELLAH.

We come to bid thee to the mid-day meal—
Thee and thy brother.

JOEL

He hath climb'd the hill,
But now with poles, that we may frame our raft
Above the sudden ruin of the flood.

THERSAH.

The hill!—and does he dread such fearful rise?

JOEL

We should prepare for that we scarce may dread,
And for no lesser wave need we a raft;
Yet still the waters swell.

SELLAH.

It is well thought of,
And with your skill your deck were safe as the ark
Thy father builds, if but the same high Will
Smile on the effort.

THERSAH.

But if he has built
For hundred years, and is a God-taught man,

And ne'er till now such flood amazed the earth,
Surely our death comes thus. Therefore my father
Hath been so sad, knowing our destiny.

JOEL.

The raft will float us all to the great ark.

THERSAH.

Alas! and must all die?—the trees—the cave—
Must all things fade?—never again
To see the sweet morn resting on the hills,
Or mark her sunny robe sweep down the plain,
Waking its myriad happiness with touch
Ethereal—never, never more to drink
The pleasant languors of the drowsy noons,
Or watch the many-coloured eve descend
Beyond the lengthening shadows. Would that we
Had died ere this! Then but our lives went out,
And happiness still lived!

JOEL.

Shall live for ever;
For months my father gathers parent lives
To people the new world.

THERSAH.

But they will be dead,
The hundred little joys that made sweet chant

But yesterday on earth, and we but strangers
Wandering through lifeless land.

SELLAH.

Cursed for its sin. .

ELLEH.

Our sin; then let us share the punishment;
Why should we wish to live in others' pain.

SELLAH.

Elleh! Elleh! these are no words of thine;
Where is thy patience? Let us bless the Lord
Who sends all for our good.

JOEL.

Perchance sends too
This joy in death that robs it of its sting.

SELLAH.

A noble joy when we would die to live;
Most fearful when it hopes to feel no more.

JOEL.

Yet is the love of other's joy best love

SELLAH.

Next to the love that hails our Maker's will.

(*Enter ABDIAL.*)

ABDIAL.

Being both and each but one, for He still wills
The happiness of all.

JOEL.

Yet now all die !

ABDIAL.

Man dies, who sinn'd, as warning to all times.

JOEL.

But if God wills our joy, His will is supreme,
Needing no punishment to make all good.

ABDIAL.

Then had great justice no joy upon earth ;
Justice whose joy is still to crown desert.

JOEL.

But little birds have done no wrong who die ;
And yon hoarse waters are the boistrous tomb
Of lives unblamed as theirs.

ABDIAL.

That made God's joy
Upon the earth. Oh man, that joy still lives !

The living green, the rapturous voice of groves,
The sweet glow of the sunlight on the leaves,
The lulling murmurs of the summer brook ;
All these are but faint shadows of the joy
That is for ever, and that hath no bound.

JOEL.

But birds have lives that now must melt in pain.

ABDIAL.

They had life in thy thought, and that thought lives.
Didst thou but know that mighty soul of thine,
Know how its length and breadth and depth transcends
The matter-world, that is a picture on it ;
Picture, where He who makes all things to live
Hath thrown some mirror'd outlines of Himself ;
Then were thy thoughts for its fate, not the birds.

JOEL.

But if birds are but picture, what art thou ?

ABDIAL.

Something to me, as thou art to thyself—
That thou canst see at least—while meaner flesh,
Acting by rule, as the green live things grow,
Are but bright threads in the great web of law,
Where no created will can mar itself,

And thus leave room for justice in the world.
 If in some faint far way such sometimes seem
 To flicker back our souls, 'tis but as plant
 Makes show of feeling through its tremulous sprays.
 Yet are these mysteries no mortal mind
 Can fathom quite; and souls may show like mine,
 Whose hours of meriting have passed for ever;
 The one safe human rule must ever be
 To hear and to obey.

JOEL.

ObeY! and what?

ABDIAL.

That voice within themselves, that all must feel
 To be the best they know. Yet should all seek
 The outward signs of God.

JOEL.

As now these waves
 That foot on foot creep upward as we speak,
 Marking a Will above great nature's law.

ABDIAL.

And those still handed down from age to age,
 Confirmed in each by wonders given through few
 To all.

JOEL.

Of which few thou thyself art one,

Whose words have unction that must heal all hearts ;
My brother saw thee on the brow last night.

ABDIAL.

Yet prayer was scarce a wonder in such time ;
And wonders oft will be where is no prayer,
Then only strong indeed when they confirm
The safer teaching of that voice within.

JOEL.

Yet now such voice would tell us pain is wrong
Wrought on the gentle innocence that dies.

ABDIAL.

Thou knowest not there is pain except with thee ;
And art thou innocent ? There is pain's show,
And show of innocence. Thou knowest no more ;
And that hath other rendering.

But, mark !

The moments might rebuke us with these waves,
Whose stern persistence knows no wordy dalliance ;
Yet will I crave one favour ere we go :
If on my midnight watch thy brother stole,
I too played eavesdropper at yester eve,
Or heard a chant borne through the darkness then,
That well might lend the courage of sweet sounds
To this hour.

SELLAH.

It is a hymn my husband framed.

ABDIAL.

Therefore most kin to truth and truth's brave
thoughts.

SELLAH.

At least the words befit the gloom.

ABDIAL.

Therefore I asked for it.

[*Song.*]

The night is sinking on its breast,
The wood, the plain, is still ;
Ere long, will numb in nature's rest,
The wond'rous human will :
That God hath all so strangely bound
In flesh that faints and feels,
That it must sleep, e'en while unwound,
Whirl fancy's thoughtful wheels.

Oh, may our sleep be of the blest,
Whom He shall watching find ;
Watching amid their earthly rest,
Chaste, generous, meek, and kind ;
When from the weird depths of the night
His call will come at last,
And man will shudder with affright
To know that time is past.

Oh, friends, while yet to sin is ours,
And flesh through every nerve
Can tempt our higher spirit-powers
With the keen thoughts that serve
The Evil that is ever Pain,
Still let our prayers ascend
Like incense fold on fold again,
Till they earth's bounds transcend.

Then through their shadowy depths will flit
Mysterious forms of love ;
Ever with mirror'd rapture lit,
Ever that point above,
With faces glimmering to the light,
E'en while they reach below,
To grasp and draw to their delight
Our suppliant hands of woe.

SCENE II.

The Hill-top.

THERSAH.

THERSAH.

This is the rock,
Surely the rock—and all is flat around ;
It must be here they lay, close to me now,
Groping like baffled child. How suddenly
This blacker gloom has fallen upon my steps ;

And as I listen from the void beneath,
 There seems to rise a deadlier roar of waters,
 Or deadlier to me, berighted thus.
 Is this the end, and must I die alone?
 Even *he* feels that end is near—I marked it—
 Twice as we sat but now, I caught his eye
 Fixed on my face so painfully with look,
 The very look my father gives, and he
 Who was the gayest, scarcely speaks to-day;
 The others hang upon that strangers' words,
 So calm and god-like, all must reverence them.
 But he, he scarcely hears, that I marked too,
 And almost grudged the time to eat, so eager
 For work again. He hath not lost all hope.
 His frank face brightened when I promised help,
 With thought to pleasure thus his earnestness—
 Vowing I too would bear these poles aloft;
 But to be lost as now—I scarce dare move
 Along the treacherous brink in this strange gloom.
 Should I call out? I could not call *his* name.
 My father far below watches the goats,
 And in such roar my voice were drowned indeed.
 Shall I throw down my pole and seek the cave?
 Yet that were weak after my promise given.
 A step—who passes? speak!

(*Enter HUR.*)

HEBER.

HUR.

Fear not! 'tis I.

THERSAH.

I cannot find the poles.

HUR.

This strangest darkness
Perplexes me as thee. Here will I lay
My burthen till it pass.

THERSAH.

But will it pass?

HUR.

It must. The noon is scarcely two hours old ;
And deep as are the waves, they quench not yet
The sun.

THERSAH.

But all things change in this dread time ;
Perchance the sun too darkens for the end.

HUR.

Nay, I remember long ago, a gloom
Thus shrouding the hushed world at the mid-day,
That seemed to fade to-night.

THERSAH.

'Twere terrible
If the light came no more.

HEBER.

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HUR.

Most terrible ;

I know no dream more fearful than of earth
All darkness and for ever.

THERSAH.

Then it passed ?

HUR.

As this will pass ere long ; these densest clouds
Make it seem darker.

THERSAH.

They will scarcely pass,
And earth one watery waste were dream of horror
Stern as thy gloom.

HUR.

Not so ; with light to cheer
Brave heart should face the rest. Methinks it must
Be faced.

THERSAH.

Therefore this raft.

HUR.

My brother's skill
Is marvellous with his axe, but now he lacks heart.

THERSAH.

And why—he, son of Seth?

HUR.

He will not face
The thought of strife alone, and I scarce blame him.

THERSAH.

But thou wilt share the chance?

HUR.

Not without Heber.
Thy father and myself met once as boys,
Who now will stand together to the end.
I have my deeds to wash out in this flood,
A man accursed.

THERSAH.

Something of curse I heard,
Yet curse grown faint with time—perchance with
sorrow.

HUR.

The evil is engrained in my being.

THERSAH.

And dost thou love her so much—that wicked woman?

HUR.

Less than myself, who now will bless this death

That frees me from her ; yet is my love fatal.
 Poor Joel followed me through love, and dies.

THERSAH.

Nay, let us haste the raft and make him live.

HUR.

He *will* live if some one will share it, Thersah.

THERSAH.

Thou wilt.

HUR.

Yet were I scarce enough, who will not.

THERSAH.

Thou, his dear brother—whom then would he have ?

HUR.

There is a dearer name than brother, maiden.
 He longs to give his guardian love its right
 To shield thee in these straits. I ask thy pardon
 If I have spoken rudely, I who love
 Both with a love dear as a father's love—
 Him ever and now thee—moments outweigh
 Keen gems—and he but lives for thee—thy mother—
 She too would help his wooing, as I feel.

THERSAH.

And am I but a child, thus to be wooed

Through mother, father, brother, and the rest !
Where is this precious boy ? In heaven's name tell him
If he had wanted me he might have come.
Yet do I thank kind heaven he has not come.
No ; say I wish him well—shall love him ever ;
Whose “ever” is but short ; love him as sister—
An elder sister, who would woo for him
With all my heart to-morrow if I might—
Is the boy blind, or something worse than blind ?
I think all men are blind who rob their brothers
Of wives, to hate the poor things ere it be long.
Was it not thus thou said'st that thou hast loved ?

HUR.

Who now will drown to bear the penalty ?

THERSAH.

My father will do that, whose love is pure
As angels' love in heaven ; who would have died
Ere he had given my mother's heart one pain,
One wilful pain, through all their glorious years.
Oh, happy mother !—happy daughters, too !—
Who now can die proud of his stainless truth.
I pray thee speed thy raft—thou and thy brother—
And leave us here, on our own hill, to die.

HUR.

'Twas scarcely fair to strike the breast I bared.

THERSAH.

And hast *thou* struck no breast?—Mark how it
lightens!

In heaven's name make your raft and go! I now
Must seek my mother, lest she faint with dread.

[*Exit* THERSAH.]

HUR.

Lightens! I cannot see the light, rather
A gloom irreparable; deadly as the steep
That hard at hand o'erhangs the deep, cold rocks.
It were a fearful moment in the darkness,
That first step upon nothing ere we sank,
Yet scarce more fearful than the night of soul
Those words have rolled along the fall within me.
At least no ruin lurks beside her path,
That side descending—Oh maid! maid!—woo thee!
And didst thou think, were I but worthy of thee,
I would not win thee from the world—or die, Thersah?
—Who never dreamed as I could dream of thee,
Or joy in life, but in a woman's love,
Nor yet such love as might be mine with thee.
Why, I could kiss the earth those small feet pressed!
Great heaven, I shall go mad!

How to tell Joel,

And smile and bear my part as I must bear it,
Who wrong no brother twice—least will wrong him,

The loving boy, who dies now for my love.
Oh, Joel, Joel ! hadst thou loved the other !—
Poor boy, we cannot love whom we should love.
She said that she would woo for him as sister.
Boy, boy ! couldst thou but love that gentle child,
How stoutly we might face the strife—we four—
Whose deadly strength rises beneath me. She is right;
It lightens fast ; not that I see the farther,
But all is wrapt now in a whiter shroud.
Joel, Joel !—may God be with thee, boy !
I owe a heart to thee and brother's love,
And thou shalt have it, though it break the while.
Aye, it was there she stood, there by her pole ;
That I will carry off at least—some one !

(Enter HEBER.)

HEBER.

I scarcely thought to find thee in this gloom,
Who heard that thou wert here. The goats are safe,
And I will join my axe and toil to thine,
To frame the raft till night.

HUR.

Hast thou seen Joel ?

HEBER.

Not Joel, but my daughter on the slope.

HEBER.

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HUR.

And spoke she aught of Joel ?

HEBER.

Not a word ;
But as I hear the stranger helps him now
To shape these poles ; and all, even my wife,
Must aid to carry them aloft.

HUR.

His will
Is rule.

HEBER.

Or should be, as I think. Let us
Come on !

Act V.

SCENE I.

The Water's Edge.

HUR and JOEL.

JOEL.

These are the last ;
And if he frame above as he hewed here,
Methinks the raft should float a herd ere now.

HUR.

Aye, it grows fast enough ; Heber and he
Both strive as if all lives hung on its fitness.

JOEL.

Yet finds he time for wondrous words the while,
That rob the hope of life of half its show
In brighter hopes beyond.

HUR.

It were bright hope
Outshone the certain happiness of earth.

JOEL.

He speaks as one who feels such should be.

HUR.

Poor boy !

He scarce had made a convert of thy joy
If I had better sped.

JOEL.

Nay, that I doubt.

Before I knew, I knew what was to be ;
And now would scarcely wish it else.

HUR.

Or say so !

Well, well, I too must follow with these poles.
This time the darkness comes indeed.

JOEL.

But now

I heard the thunder muttering again.

HUR.

The clouds are deep enough to dart out flames,
Wide as that rush beyond. In truth, it bids fair
To be a fearful night. Well, God be with thee !

[*Exit* HUR.]

JOEL.

A few more fitted, and my task is done ;

Then I can listen to his words again,
As we shall work together on the hill,
Those glorious words that soothe my pain away.
Thersah avoids, but her sweet sister knows
My fate, and grieves; I feel she grieves for me.
Hur, too, is sad; more sad than I have seen him.
I am not sad; a new force grows within
That will give strength to meet all things unmoved;
Even this deadly blackness creeping thus
Up at my feet, ere yet the rent cloud-mass
Above us join its torrents to the roar
That sweeps along the ancient river-bed.
All day the rain fell everywhere but here,
As if the Lord had willed to give these last hours
In peace to us, His friends. His friends—oh name
Of names! Am I a *friend* who left my father,
Wronging in thoughtlessness his loving heart,
And sinning thus against the infinite care
It images on earth? How can I love
God, whom I see not, when I grieved those
Who were the type of God given to my youth;
The type of love, but not of love in death?
Had I but known that love I could not sin;
And in that love I hope, hating my sin,
Much that it grieved my father, but most Him,
Who having made us, dies to save from sin.
Alas! were I but pure as are these others,

Methinks this eve were happiest of my life,
 Who know at last what goodness is indeed,—
 Goodness. I might have served with every pain,
 And act, and word, as I will serve henceforth,
 So help me, Heaven! and first in this my work—
 Why comes he thus again?

SCENE II.

The Hill.

THERSAH.

THERSAH.

Bidah! my Bidah!

Thou shouldst not know me, I am not myself—
 Not thy own mistress that thou lovest so, Bidah!
 Nay, never lay thy nose against my cheek,
 I am no Thersah more, but a sick fool,
 Whose heart grows faint if but a step come near—
 A step that I should hate of all earth's sounds.
 My pet! my precious pet! 'tis sweet at least
 That I have thee with me who tell no tales;
 Although the poor tears damp thee thus, Bidah.
 Whate'er may come we never part again.
 Thou wert too dear to leave behind, wee one!
 Oh Bidah, shall I ever see him more?

Were it not best I never saw him more ?
Who thank this darkness that I see him not
For whom all earth were dark where he is not.
Pet ! pet ! I almost hated him, I think,
With his cold words of life—life with another—
Hear how the thunder groans ! Brave, brave thunder !
I fear it little as thyself—who here
Can hide amid the rocks—we two. My work
Is done, else would I pass him still as stoutly.
I feel he loves me—loves me well enough,
But not enough to cease to torture Bidah ;
Loving his brother better. Bidah ! Bidah !
Now I have told thee all ; dost thou not scorn me ?
I scorn myself ; then must I wrong myself,
For we should think no thought should shame us,
Bidah,
Nor shall we as I live. We will go down
And meet them calmly as becomes us both.
All things must soon have end, and pain with all.
Again the thunder answers from afar
Its grim “amen” to my poor words.

(*Enter HUR.*)

HUR.

Thersah !

THERSAH.

It is the hour of the evening meal ;
I come.

HUR.

Thersah !

THERSAH.

What wouldst thou with me, sir

HUR.

Entreat thy patience for some little moments,
While I deny all that till now I have said.

THERSAH.

Then must it be for hours, who have said much.

HUR.

The thunder warns us hours are scarce. Below,
The creeping waves rise faster on the bank.
Much, too, that I have said must stand for ever.
It is most true that I am man accursed,
Stain'd with dark sin that needs a life to cleanse ;
Without one virtue I can call my own—
Unless, indeed, it be the hope that dies not,
Despite the matter of a hundred deaths ;
Still struggling ever for that glorious life
That God can give in earthly happiness,
If other will but join itself to mine.

THERSAH.

Therefore we framed the raft for thee and thy brother.

HUR.

Nay, he hath vowed but now, no human words
Shall draw him from thy father and this stranger.
Methinks thy sister, too, will share their fate.

THERSAH.

And dost thou hope for happiness on earth,
When all thou lovest are dead ?

HUR.

Methinks none die ;
But perfect souls are taken from the earth,
Or from the sight of those who live on earth,
Yet to regain them in the end.

THERSAH

Then hope
With thee can see no pain in life or death.

HUR.

Alas ! whose hope is keenest fear the most.
I pray thee, pardon me, if these my words
Lack somewhat of the subtler rectitude,
That habit and just thought should give such themes,
Who feel my reverence more fitly garbs
Itself in silence. I am but a plain man
Who come to sue, as I have never sued,
Never with all my soul till now, that she

Who listens to me here will take my hand ;
This hand I hold out thus ; and let me strive
To save her in these straits.

THERSAH.

As Joel's wife ?

HUR.

Now would it were as wife to one like Joel,
No maiden but as mine.

THERSAH.

Thou sawest, sir,
I loved ; and so have come in charity,
With this thy pretty speech.

HUR.

In charity !
Oh Thersah ! Thersah ! charity ! charity !
Couldst thou but know the chill that froze my heart
First hearing Joel speak his love—who felt
Before I might not dream of love. My queen !
Now let the waters come ! the strength of ten
Is in each limb of mine.

THERSAH.

They can but kill,
And ere thy step, thy spirit mounted here,
Making me bless a death beloved by thee.

HUR.

It may be death, for I am man accursed.

THERSAH.

Hur is accursed, then be thou Hur no more ;
Yet will I grudge the sweet name of my dreams.
But first, oh friend, get me my father's blessing,
Else will I never leave his side.

HUR.

My own !

I had far rather see thee die.

THERSAH.

And Hur,

Good Hur, who shall be Hur no more—the goat—
My little goat ! It too must come with us,
And be as safe as I upon thy poles.

HUR.

Even as thou ; it cannot eat its fellows ;
But I will gather grass for it ere night.

THERSAH.

This night, thou thinkest, will bring all to end ?

HUR.

So all acts point of those who seem so wise.

THERSAH.

I felt a drop but then, the same huge drop.
Yet am I glad if we must leave them, we leave
For strife, I scarce could bear it else, even
With thee. Now take me to my mother!

SCENE III.

The Cave.

SELLAH and ELLEH.

ELLEH.

With that flash I saw
The gleam of water at our very feet.

SELLAH.

Doing thy father's bidding we are safe.

ELLEH.

And out, far as the eye could pierce the gloom,
The quick waves rose and fell.

SELLAH.

I marked but the rain
Falling between thy leaves in lines of light.

ELLEH.

Poor vines ! dressing them last we saw afar
The guests that God hath sent us. Abdial says
It *was* God sent them now. How lonely, mother,
Were these dread hours without them !

SELLAH.

Youth soon makes friends.
For me, thy father and yourselves are all.
Yet now that I stand by thee thus, and listen
To the dull lashing at our feet, my thought
Goes back to a great river long ago ;
And one whose little waist I often clasp'd
As I clasp thine to-night. On her death stole then
As now it steals on all.

ELLEH.

On her alone ;
That was most sad for both.

SELLAH.

And yet her heart
Grew strong at last ; and oft my mother came
To her in dream, or so she thought.

ELLEH.

Thy mother !—
Thinkest thou she and the dear mother gone
Are friends now ?

SELLAH.

Dearest friends, as all will soon be.

ELLEH.

Again a flash! Markedst thou the waves afar?

SELLAH.

A stronger central current hurries there.

ELLEH.

Yet on the rocks beneath there scarce seem'd change
Since the last gleam. I wonder that they come not.
Another sudden rise puts out the fire.

SELLAH.

Listen! I hear no step upon the path.

ELLEH.

No step. Was it so very large—that river?

SELLAH.

A waste of waters when the mighty rains
Poured down. Often we stood above it at night
Wondering.

ELLEH.

Oh, mother! something is alive
Beneath us in the waves. I saw it struggle
Against the rock.

HEBER.

SELLAH.

Alive! I will hold thus
A lighted brand over the edge—now look!

ELLEH.

A drowning beast. Mother, mother! a tiger!

SELLAH.

Fear not! He strives in vain against the stone.
Poor life, caught in his lair far up the vale!

ELLEH.

I fear him not; nay, I would rather save.

SELLAH.

It were impossible. I doubt thy father
Could help him there.

ELLEH.

Alas, what sullen pain
Is in his half-closed eyes!

SELLAH.

See, he falls back!

ELLEH.

And now is swept away amid the gloom.

SELLAH.

Passing like evil dream of sin and woe.

ELLEH.

Why did God make the tiger ?

SELLAH.

For mǎn's fall.

To give some thought of human rage.

ELLEH.

Alas !

And must we die like that ?

SELLAH.

Even like that.

Yet is there worse than death—those tired eyes
In their fierce hopelessness awoke for me
The horror of last night.

ELLEH.

Mother ! mother !

Was it so very terrible that face ?

SELLAH.

My child, all things are terrible around us !
The trackless waters surging wildly on ;
These half-lit rocks, the eddying depth below,
The darkness overhead that seems too monstrous

For lightning flash to rend the half of its horror—
 The very feel all is unnatural,
 And all the harbinger of death—yet all
 To that dread glimpse of agony eternal,
 Are but as shadows flitting o'er the face
 Of summer morn, not wreck of a cursed world.

•
 ELLEH.

But Abdial said that we might pray ; as if
 The corpse had been indeed of our great father
 Ice-bound for ages. Oh mother, and thou sawest
 The lightning's burn upon its brow !

SELLAH.

That lay

Supine upon the hill that seem'd himself ;
 Scarce could I trace the limbs through the dim ice
 That wound them round in ghastly coverture,
 As though the rock were he—he and his hell.

ELLEH.

And are such sights in death ? Mother ! mother !
 May I not hold one hand when the end comes ?

SELLAH.

We shall not separate. But now bring hither
 Another torch, that we may watch the waves.

SCENE IV.

Another part of the Hill.

ABDIAL and HEBER.

ABDIAL.

I told him

His brother nobly struggled with his love;
And even as I spoke he bade me fly
With word that he had changed. "My brother knows
How weak and changeable I am," he said,
"Tell him that I had changed ere yet I heard."
A generous youth and worthy of this time.

HEBER.

Although the rain be heavier on the rock,
Pouring in very stream thus by our side,
The air is clearer, for I see far down
The dark face of the waters.

ABDIAL.

With the rain

And night the cloud has lifted from the earth,
And over all is the full moon.

HEBER.

Lone moon

Ere long above a gleaming waste of waters.

ABDIAL.

First the great sun will flash out on the world
Triumphant, making bright each circling ripple
With joy. Of things material, light and water
Will still have life on earth.

HEBER.

And where shall we be ?

ABDIAL.

Even with God.

HEBER.

And all the wretched ones
That this black rush has stifled in their sin.

ABDIAL.

Leave them to Him who ever is most just
And merciful ; rest thou in that dear thought,
For whom no thing is certain but thyself ;
And that He tells thee.

HEBER.

And some loves on earth.

ABDIAL.

That He hath given to be the earthly bond
Between Him and thyself.

HEBER.

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HEBER.

But I am sure
That stone is stone.

ABDIAL.

As thou art sure the sun
Moves overhead from east to west.

HEBER.

Even so.

ABDIAL.

Then know, O friend, it is the earth that turns
Around a seeming stationary sun.
If time were left us I could prove my words.

HEBER.

It matters not for me, who still believe
Each word of thine.

ABDIAL.

Then is the stone being stone,
More certain now, than was five minutes since
The movement of the sun? Oh, friend, all things
Are God's, who is in all things infinite,
And so beyond man's thought. The thing most good,
If it alone existed, does exist
In very truth, and with it all things most good.

In this the law of God's omnipotence.
And thus no man should grudge another's fate,
But leave it still to God, who acts on us
Through other wills, as if alone He will'd.

HEBER.


I think I catch some shadow of thy thought
That softens rude extremes, whose untuned hardness
Hath ever marr'd life's picture on my mind—
Yet is it strange when men were made for God,
That scarce their hundredth part have heard of Him.

ABDIAL.

The hundredth part of those that live to-day.
Not of the mighty multitudes unborn,
That yet shall teem upon the earth when ages
More numberless than sands upon a plain,
Shall see the sons of Adam girt with knowledge,
So wondrous that their every thought may speed,
Swifter than winds from pole to pole. Already
The skies yield lore to them, and rocks and air,
And written words can chain the spoil for ever—
Then each shall know of all, and knowing choose.

HEBER.

But why should we the first be the most dark?—
Ha! by that flash I surely saw afar,
Once more, those cliffs of ice.



HEBER.

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ABDIAL.

Now is the end

Most near.

HEBER.

By this all must have left the cave,
And we shall join upon the flat above us.

ABDIAL.

Beside the raft; there to wait God's will.

HEBER.

Yet is the water still long yards beneath.

ABDIAL.

Its roar is angrier and rising. Soon
A mighty wave will sweep over the hill,
Meeting it may be reflux from the south.
All souls are ready, and the Lord wills not
More lingering pain !

HEBER.

Then tell me, even now,
Whence He hath sent thy aid to this our strait.

ABDIAL.

As far as thou canst hear. My earthly frame

Y

Is, as thou knowest, somewhat of thy kin ;
My human soul hath dwelt in Paradise,
Yet is another will now joined with it,
That ever stands nearest the throne of God,
Who have indeed but one will—even His.

HEBER.

Oh Spirit, I adore thee, and through thee
The Goodness that had pity on our fate !

ABDIAL.

Knowing in times to come He sends no angel,
But comes Himself in frame even like ours,
To give His comfort to His faithful few.

HEBER.

Alas ! and will but few be faithful then ?

ABDIAL.

That is His secret who still speaks to each
In voice no other man may hear, and none
May judge of but Himself.

HEBER.

Hark ! my wife calls.

SCENE V.

The Summit.

ALL.

ABDIAL.

As the strange darkness at the noon
Foretold, as we might think, the real night,
So will this sudden ruin warn all time,
That time must be no more—time the first made !

HEBER.

No more ! Yet is it not but form that word
No more ? Surely being made time is for ever
For them who live from time.

ABDIAL.

Thou thinkest it,
Who are a man that think as men must think,
From that which they have known, or felt, or seen ;
But even as thine eyes may seem to lie ;
And this thou grantest, as we sat but now ;
So may thy deeper nature's spirit-sight,
The wondrous faculty of human thought,
Deceive with its first judgment when it rules,
What things may be, not what may seem to be.

HEBER.

But o'er my sight the spirit rules supreme ;
Thus can I grant the sun moves not, granting
A proper cause be shown for such belief ;
But thought, being thought and king, is king of all ;
So if it errs, it errs, and there's an end.

HEBER.

Nay, it can rule itself as a king must,
Who would be king indeed, denying oft
The first and strongest promptings of his heart ;
So should our thought for proper reasons shown,
Debating doubt of that it seems to feel ;
And thus time may have end for us who first
Have felt in time, who yet shall feel for ever.

SELLAH.

It is a wondrous thought, that thought of ever !

HUR.

Enough to freeze the courage in a man,
And send him drifting idly down the shadows,
Like those huge mounds of ice.

ABDIAL.

Not such the thoughts
That won thy fellow-voyager. To-night

Ever should be for each the word of comfort,
Who now must separate to meet for ever.

HUR.

It is well said. Methinks, sir, thou and I
Are the two poles, through which these others round
Must severally take their proper stations.

ABDIAL.

Nay, now thou hast no station of thine own.

HUR.

And so must wish humility good-bye,
Or keep it all for her by whom I stand—
For once a nuptial speech lies not.

HEBER.

Stern bridal !

When death stands thus beside the groom, and roar
Of his hoarse music rises on our words.

ABDIAL.

Yet as I stand I hear far other sound.
Even as we thus crown this hill to-night,
Waiting for that which cometh in these shades,
With our pale faces lit but by the glares,
Whose thunder dulls amid the general groan
Of bursting Nature underneath—so soon

Another group will crown another hill
In darkness like to this, whose pain divine
The shrouded seraphs worship, conqueror
Of death and hell.

HEBER.

And could not the All-powerful
Have conquer'd death and hell without His pain?

ABDIAL.

Some thoughts, O friend, it may be that the angels
Must fear in heaven; yet being God He dies.

JOEL.

How else could we have loved with all our hearts?

HUR.

But other men know not of this.

ABDIAL.

Who all
Have love of Him as God implanted in them,
Still swaying to the right for which we live.
But now to me there comes that cry of the years—
Not yet to you, save by a miracle—
A cry of praise to her of Adam born,
Who stands all sinless by the tree of grace,
Even as Eve stood once by that of sin,

Destined to crush the natural joy for ever,
That was the birthright of each life from God.

HEBER.

She that the pilgrim saw in paradise.

SELLAH.

The queen of earth and angels, with her Child
Upon her knee—the mighty One—who yet
Shall save us all.

ABDIAL.

In Whom we live, and move,
And have our being—Whose are time and space,
To mould as clay is moulded in the hand.
Now listen, and above this roar of death
You too shall catch the strain that seems to still
The brimming waters even as we listen.

JOEL.

Lo! on the distant shadow there are shapes
As of great domes that mingle with the sky.

HEBER.

All earth grows ghostly.

ABDIAL.

For us soon to be
But ghosts—yet ever dearest to His love

Who dies indeed with every human heart—
That loves Him still in death.

HUR.

The music !

[Chant from the darkness.]

Beside the cross the Mother stood
Watching the slow drops of His blood
Sink in the earth He made.
The blood that granteth joy to all ;
But now upon her soul must fall
Like keen sword's keenest blade.

Alas ! what mortal ere shall know
The torture of that maid below,
The torture of her Son ?—
How every quivering nerve above
Had its poor fellow in the love
By which our hope was won !

Where is the man that will not weep
As we with Mary vigil keep
Beneath the cross of pain ?
With her, the Mother of the Lord,
Her to whom came the wondrous word
That one had known no stain.

When for her kindred's cruel sin
She saw her Saviour's pains begin,
His flesh mangled with blows—
The Saviour that the Babe had been—
And heard that cry His pains between,
Whose pain but mother knows.

Oh, Mother, Mother ! fount of love,
Grant us some share of thine to prove
As we stand here with thee.
Grant that our sinful bosoms learn
With love of our dear Lord to burn,
And thus His comfort be.

Oh, Holy Mother, grant us this,
A shadow of that pain of His
Upon each willing heart ;
That we may soothe us with the thought
That if that woe on Him we brought,
We bear some little part.

Yes, grant us still with thee to grieve,
Ever and ever while we live,
That loving cross beside ;
With thee thy burning tears to share,
And some poor portion of thy care,
For our God crucified.

Oh ! Virgin of all virgins dear,
Sweet Lady to our cry give ear,
Give us to grieve with thee ;
Give us to bear our pain with His,
Sharing the death that won our bliss
For great eternity.

HEBER.

It hath ceased.

SELLAH.

And see,
The water slowly lifting to our feet.

HEBER.

HUR.

Had they no friends to strive for them that day ?

ABDIAL.

What is to be must be.

HUR.

Methinks no fate
Should make men leave such Lord in such an hour.

JOEL.

And shall none stand beside the cross but she ?

ABDIAL.

No man but one. Yet all shall stand indeed
Who love their deaths as sent to them from him.

HEBER.

Then has our turn come ; the struggling night
Shudders again with more tremendous sound
Than yet appall'd through all these days of dread.
It is no thunder, for it ceases not.

HUR.

But grows upon the ear like coming winds.

ABDIAL.

Stand thou upon the raft, thou and thy spouse ;
Be brave, and pray !

HEBER.

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HEBER.

All praise to him who sends
The death he soon will share!

SELLAH.

Mark now the waves!

HEBER.

That sudden rise had almost reached the poles,
Yet seem'd some backward current from below.

JOEL.

It heaved, and sinks.

HEBER.

Leaving a waif behind
On this last bank. Now, as I live, a harp!
My harp!

ELLEH.

Alas! the ice!

THERSAH.

Elleh! Elleh!

ABDIAL.

With it the end.

APPENDIX.

NOTE A.—P. 145.

Then thou and I shall hear alway
This song of the stream.

A MESSENGER, *Act IV. Scene II.*

I should be sorry that this should be taken for anything but an imaginative suggestion. The true view I believe to be, that thought bears the same relation to our souls that matter does to our bodies, being assimilated by being willed just as material food is assimilated by being digested. If it is objected that thoughts are constantly fading into nothingness, while the aggregate of matter is unchangeable, I should reply, that the lightest human thought is stored up for eternity in the memory of God, along with the ever-changing aspects of our external world, which are perhaps, if I may say so without irreverence, a part of His voice to man. At the same time, I by no means wish to maintain that the parity between matter and thought extends to their both being unchanging in their aggregates. On the contrary, the very name of author would seem to imply creation. What I hope I have proved in my Pamphlet on Free-will is, that they are not interchangeable, since no destruction of thought will increase the material world by a single grain, or line, or force.

NOTE B.—P. 190.

Not for a year or two. But now they rise not,
And so —.

HEBER, *Act I. Scene I.*

Until very lately I had not the remotest idea of the reasons which could induce persons who knew the state of the evidence to doubt of the resurrection of our Lord ; being indeed inclined to put much of it down to that vanity of our times that must produce its new views even at the expense of the personality of Homer or the genius of Shakespere. Quite lately, however, I have seen them put forward by a hand which is certainly well able to lend every adventitious grace, and they seem to come entirely to this. Herodotus tells us that before the battle of Salamis a phantom voice called upon the Greeks to advance, just as St Paul tells us that another Voice spoke to him on his road to Damascus. Nobody believes Herodotus, and therefore nobody ought to believe St Paul. Now, to make the two cases at all similar, it seems to me that Herodotus should have heard his voice with his own ears ; and having had his whole life changed by it, should have died in the end to attest his belief in its truth. But even these distinctions fade into utter insignificance before those which hold out the resurrection and ascension of our Lord as mighty facts utterly apart. For them not one witness died, but many witnesses ; and witnesses who by these very truths have conquered the world ; for from the very earliest times they were put forward as the foundations of the Christian Faith. The beauty of that Faith only affords corroborative evidence of their truth. An eloquent advocate of very different theories confesses, as I believe, that in his *healthier* moments he feels that there ought to be a God. Can he find a nobler conception of One than that of Him who forgave the sins of the woman that loved Him as He sat in the house of Simon the Pharisee—

of Him who used His Divine omnipotence to suffer as a man for His creatures that they might know to the end of time, not what God *is*—that to our limited natures is impossible—but what God *was on earth* ?

Mr Arnold tells us that he does not know what “to be” means, but I would venture to suggest that it is plainly the word that English-speaking peoples use to express the one idea that is absolutely simple and utterly unresolvable into anything but itself. Growth and breathing necessarily imply something from which growth was made, or into which breath was poured, but what “is,” “is” only ; and therefore it was that God, Who, as theologians tell us, is eternal, and so could grow from nothing, and is omni-present, and so could breathe into nothing, said of Himself of old, “I am Who am.” *What* He is we can not know ; but perhaps it is our own fault if we do not know that He *is*.

NOTE C.—P. 339.

So may thy deeper nature's spirit-sight,
The wondrous faculty of human thought,
Deceive with its first judgment when it rules
What things may be, not what may seem to be.

HEBER, *Act V. Scene V.*

Since the above was written, I have seen a paper in the *Dublin Review* essaying, with much appearance of confidence, to prove that the Experimental Philosophy is false by the fact, that few people have ever remarked or know that all tri-lateral figures are triangular, while every body upon examination must admit that proposition to be necessarily true. It seems to me that the whole force of this argument would be destroyed by simply substituting “corner” for “angle;” for surely the most uneducated mind has been discovering from its infancy that four straight walls or poles enclose four corners, and three three. What the laws of supernatural, or perhaps even of transcendent, space may be, is quite another matter.

I have also, in common with the rest of the reading public, been fortunate enough to obtain a general view of some of the first living opinions upon many of the subjects referred to in the foregoing pages, but I cannot help thinking that sufficient stress has scarcely been laid in them upon the general consent of the world down to our own times to regard the priestly traditions of Egypt as being for the most part a mass of clever imposition. We should remember that the earliest school of Christian philosophy rose amid the shadows of Egyptian temples, and Origen was scarcely the man to quail before a thought obtruded on him from all sides ; or others, less rash than he, amid the many miracles that testified to the truth of the Faith for which they were everyday ready to die. We should remember too, that the libraries of the Ptolemies were then in existence ; but perhaps the best argument against the truthfulness of the old writings is to be found in the fact, that the new attempts to construct Egyptian Chronology from the most improved sources, vary with each other by at least ten thousand years. I do not think that any one even now would be much inclined to believe that the father of a given king was a god simply because we find him so set down in hieroglyphics ; and if it is indeed true that three thousand years ago there had been an unbroken civilization of many thousands of years in the valley of the Nile, while there also existed "Red Men in America, Maories in the Pacific, Mongols in China, Anios in Japan, Papuans in New Guinea, Tasmanians, not then extinct, nearer the antarctic circle, Esquimaux at the opposite pole, and a wide dispersion of the sub-varieties of the Negro race over the African continent,"* it seems to me to require explanation how it came to pass that a thousand years afterwards much of the most favoured, and to-day closely-cultivated, portions of the globe, were little better than vast tracts of forest-land ; for the use

* Speech of Professor Owen at the Oriental Congress.

of metal cutting-tools should, under such circumstances, have been previously spread at least half as fast as the use of gunpowder in modern times. Perhaps it is even on its own natural merits quite as likely a supposition that the families of the sons of Noah, increasing and multiplying some five thousand years ago, naturally built their first cities in the spots which tradition pointed out as the seats of the ruined glories of their forefathers; and if some single family among them was stricken, naturally or supernaturally, with a strange diversity of form or colour, we can well imagine that it was forced away into those parts of the world where the Negro race has ever been to be found. Just in the same way we can well conceive that the bold wanderers who first reached the shores of the great northern and western seas, cut off from all communication, may have taught their children to imitate after a fashion in flint or other stone, as the most available material, the bronze weapons which they carried themselves; and it is a very remarkable fact, that it was stated, and not contradicted, at the late Archæological Congress in Stockholm, that an antiquity of three or four thousand years is the highest that can be assigned to what might perhaps be called the human stone age in Sweden. But to my view, as I have written in one of the argumentative chapters of my first volume, a fair consideration of the different operations of reason and instinct, as we see them in their *highest* developments, must ever make it absurd to maintain that the universe owes its origin to any force less than a designing Mind; and if that Mind exists, one of the first duties of human reason must be to seek for Its revelations. The very first is to obey It in conscience.



